

ISRAEL'S REFUSENIKS • CORPORATE AMERICA—ROTTEN TO THE CORE

# In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

August 19, 2002

## election 2002 is anybody out there?

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Those Dithering  
Democrats

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To Watch

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**Editorial correspondence and letters** should be sent to: 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647. Phone: (773) 772-0100. Fax: (773) 772-4180. E-mail: [itt@inthesetimes.com](mailto:itt@inthesetimes.com).

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## Editorial

# Rotten to the Core

**T**he ill winds of financial scandal—with gusts of public outrage over vanished retirement savings—finally blew even Republican politicians into the ranks of corporate reform. The unanimously approved Senate accounting reforms introduced by Sen. Paul Sarbanes (D-MD) will likely prevail—despite Republican objections—over the weaker House legislation passed last spring. The Senate bill is no panacea, but it is a reasonable start: a new public board to oversee accounting firms, restrictions on consulting by auditors, mandated rotation of auditors, tougher standards on executive responsibility and insider trading, and more disclosure.

The same political winds may also blow more Democrats to victory in the fall, but only a few will have earned the boost. Newt Gingrich's 1994 Contract With America accelerated the deregulation of corporate America and facilitated, in the words of Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan, the "outsized increase in opportunities for avarice" and "infectious greed" of the '90s.

However, many Democrats now expressing outrage—including Sen. Joseph Lieberman and the other "New Democrats"—were among the most adamant advocates of corporate interests and financial deregulation. They are now cautioning Democrats not to be too populist or go "too far" with corporate regulation—advice that is bad politically, economically and ethically.

The problems that led to the downfall of companies from Enron to WorldCom were the result not of a few bad apples, but of a diseased tree. In the most egregious cases, executives may have violated laws, but thousands of others were only a few steps behind in a large gray area. Those include President Bush, whose financial windfalls at Harken Energy and the Texas Rangers exemplify the ways in which the powerful abuse their insider positions and political influence to enrich themselves at the public expense.

At least as deep in the moral swamp was Dick Cheney, who must regret his enthusiastic videotaped praise of Arthur Andersen's special consulting skills now that he faces a lawsuit charging that he was involved in grossly overstating earnings while CEO at Halliburton. While the right-wing culture warriors railed against the permissive '60s generation, Bush, Cheney and Co. unleashed corporate permissiveness that undermined supposedly conserv-

ative values such as trust, upon which even capitalism relies.

While technological advances contributed to the boom, financial innovation has been truly the driving force in the American economy for the past couple of decades. Whether it was junk bonds, hostile takeovers, derivatives trading, aggressive accounting, currency speculation, privatization of public assets or creation of global empires and exploitation of tax havens, this wave of financial innovation has contributed less to growth of overall real wealth than it has to expropriation of a larger share of the wealth by the business elite. The problem of the American economy is not just the fraudulent profit reports, but the growing power of a largely deregulated financial sector.

Watching their assets vanish, investors blame overly powerful, dishonest executives. Certainly legislation in 1995 restricting the ability of shareholders to sue executives contributed to the deregulatory debacle. But simply strengthening shareholders' rights is no solution. Indeed, executives inflated stock values under pressure to satisfy short-term demands of shareholders (and to raise the value of their own stock options). Executive powers and privileges should be reined in, starting with legislation that treats stock options as an expense and strengthens independent audit and compensation committees.

The scandals, however, should open an even wider debate. Quite often, both executives and shareholders have fleeting stakes in

**The problems that led to the downfall of Enron and WorldCom were not the result of a few bad apples, but a diseased tree.**

a corporation, hoping to make a quick killing, while many lower-level employees stick with a corporation much longer. But neither consumers nor workers have a voice in corporate governance. As public disgust with corporate abuse of power grows, there is an opportunity to push for more vigorous regulation of financial markets and more democratic governance of corporations. Corporations are chartered by government to serve the public interest, and the public should have a larger role in governing them.

—David Moberg

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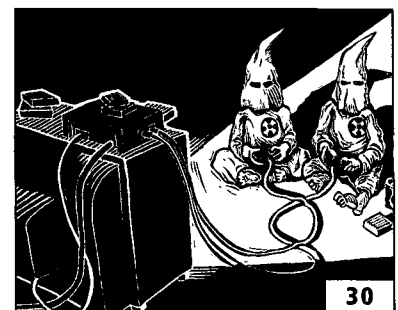
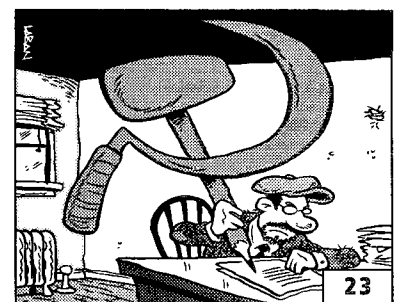
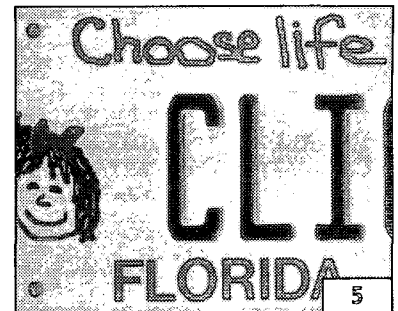
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Cover photo: Joeff Davis



## Wrong on the Right

In his two recent reports on the presidential election in France, Doug Ireland paints a picture of "mushrooming growth of xenophobic, ultra-nationalist parties ... [that] continues with a vengeance," and "rising neofascism" confirming "the solid implantation of the National Front in important regions of France." Most of this alarmist view is based on grossly misrepresented numbers.

For the first round on April 21, Ireland stated ("Right Again," May 27) that Jean-Marie Le Pen "won nearly a million votes more than his score in the 1995 contest for chief of state." Wrong: Le Pen received 234,000 votes more than he did in 1995.

For the second round on May 5, Ireland claims ("Downright Shocking," June 10) that "Le Pen increased his score for the neofascist right by some 720,000 votes compared to the first-round (April 21)." Wrong again: Le Pen's total was 5,526,000—only 54,000 more than the neofascist right had in round one, when Le Pen and Bruno Megret, who split from Le Pen three years ago to form his own far-right party, together received 5,472,000. Le Pen increased his own vote total by 721,000—but in a two-person runoff with a sharply reduced abstention rate (20.3 percent compared to a record-high 28.4 in the first round).

Ireland's contortions to the contrary, there was no big shift to the right in France. In the second round, Le Pen got 17.8 percent of the vote, 1.4 percentage points less than the neofascist share in round one, and probably less than a comparable candidate would have received in a comparable runoff election in the United States.

**Richard B. Du Boff**  
Haverford, Pennsylvania

Doug Ireland states that Denmark was one of the five European countries in which an extreme right-wing party was part of the government. The party he is talking about is the Danish Folk Party (Dansk Folkeparti). DF, however, is not part of the government. Denmark has a minority government led by the Liberal Agrarians (Venstre) with the participation of the Conservatives.

DF is the largest support party for the government, but they have no portfolios; in the technical parliamentary sense, they are part of the opposition. The two ruling conservative parties would not dare invite DF into the government (at this point in time). DF is not considered "house-trained," to use the Danish expression.

Since the election six months ago, DF has helped the government pass a radical tightening of the Danish immigration laws. This was the heart of DF's campaign. In return, they voted for the government's conservative budget. Other than in questions of immigration and E.U. integration (which they adamantly oppose), DF has been extremely busy trying to occupy the space of the Social Democrats.

There is no denying, as Ireland points out, that one out of every five Danes voted for DF. The party itself is reminiscent of the mass-appeal, corporatist fascist parties of the '30s. I wonder sometimes if 20 percent of all Europeans—if not 20 percent of all people—tend to fascism.

**Jeffrey Brown Århus**  
Copenhagen, Denmark

**Doug Ireland replies:** The figures I quoted came from *Le Monde*; if that great newspaper was wrong, then so was I. But Richard Du Boff's assertion that there has been "no big shift to the right in France" has surely been refuted by the June 16 legislative runoff, which gave Jacques Chirac's hard-right coalition a two-thirds majority in parliament and saw the defeat of many leading leftists.

Despite an abstention rate in that election of nearly 40 percent, a massive rejection of the traditional parties both left and right (exit polls showed that three-quarters of those who voted for the extreme left in the presidential first round, and half of those who voted for the extreme right, didn't vote on June 16), Le Pen's candidates again rolled up scores around a third of the vote in those regions where it is solidly established. And a poll taken by *Le Monde* a month after the presi-

dential elections showed more than a quarter of the French agreed with Le Pen's principle theses.

If I was "alarmist" about Le Pen's April 21 defeat of Socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin for a place in the presidential runoff, then so was much of France—which saw a massive mobilization in the streets every day for two solid weeks before the runoff involving millions of anti-fascist demonstrators. Not to mention a nearly unanimous mass media outcry against the dangers posed by Le Pen—whose campaign succeeded in driving France's political center of gravity sharply to the right, as the vote on June 16 demonstrated.

Jeffrey Brown Århus is correct—although the Dansk Folkeparti is not a formal part of the governing conservative coalition, it has voted with the government on most occasions; and it, too, has dragged the political center of gravity to the right through its xenophobia.

The electoral collapse of Western European social democracy is now near-total: Only Gerhard Schröder in Germany remains of the "rose Europe" that dominated the '90s—and he's in deep trouble in the polls. If that doesn't constitute a shift to the right in Europe, I don't know what would.

## Corrections

In "Right Again" (May 27), Slovakia's former prime minister, Vladimir Meciar, was wrongly identified as a member of the Slovak National Party; Meciar heads the Movement for Democratic Slovakia. In "Understanding Arafat" (June 10), an editor's error dropped the quote marks from the final paragraph, which should have been attributed to Ali Jarbawi.

**Terry LaBan**





## Above the Law

The military seeks exemptions from green regulations

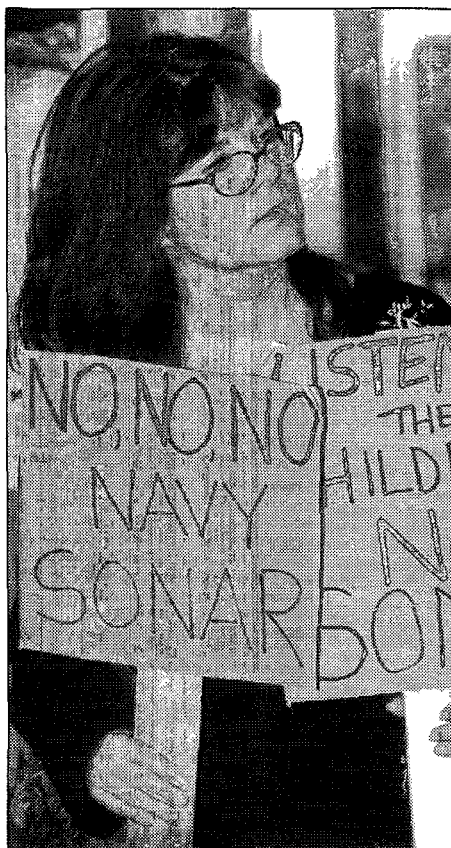
By Jonathan Cook

The military has benefited greatly from the war on terror, with increased funding and sweeping new powers since September 11. Now, the Department of Defense wants more: It's asking for greater flexibility in its responsibilities under the Endangered Species and the Migratory Bird Treaty Acts, two of the most powerful weapons in the effort to save the nation's vanishing biodiversity.

In May, Rep. Joel Hefley (R-Colorado) introduced the military-drafted Readiness and Range Preservation Initiative as a last-minute rider to the House version of the 2003 defense authorization bill. It proposed to give the armed forces flexible schedules for meeting Clean Air Act requirements, an exemption from cleaning up toxic munitions on operational firing ranges, and a higher burden of proof in causing "harm" to marine mammal, among other things. The House Armed Services Committee excised some of these measures, but still approved loopholes in compliance with the Endangered Species and Migratory Bird Treaty Acts big enough to drive a tank through. While the current Senate version contains no exemptions, they may return as the budget heads to committee, or on the Senate floor.

The Pentagon claims that the cumulative burden of regulations is undercutting troop readiness. According to DOD spokesman Maj. Jay Steuck, "Environmental laws have nibbled away at our ability to provide necessary training." Hefley says the new law would "strike a needed balance between the needs of our military to adequately and effectively train for combat, and the need to protect our environment."

Clearly, not everyone agrees. On April 24, the leading green groups sent a joint letter to Congress predicting that exemptions would inevitably lead to more pollution, habitat loss and threats to birds and marine mammals. "Americans overwhelmingly believe that the federal gov-



Green groups are fighting encroachments on environmental laws by the military.

ernment should comply with these important environmental laws," says Randy Moorman of Earthjustice. Indeed, one April poll found that, even after September 11, 85 percent believe that no government agency should be permitted to violate existing law.

But Steve Taylor of the Maine-based Military Toxics Project, a citizen watchdog group, says the military thinks differently. "Deep down, the Pentagon leadership doesn't believe they should be subject to these laws," he says. "Everyone should just leave them alone and let them run things."

In recent years, critics say, the armed forces have been systematically polluting the air, water and soil around their bases: According to a 2001 report coauthored by the Toxics Project, there are now more than 27,000 toxic hot spots on 8,500 military properties nationwide.

The military has also been hit with a flurry of lawsuits alleging harm to federally protected species. In 1999, Defenders of Wildlife sued on behalf of the endan-

gered Sonoran pronghorn, which inhabits its desert regions in southern Arizona. Low-level flights, bombing runs and other training maneuvers by the Air Force and Marines, particularly during fawning season, were blamed for contributing to the pronghorn population's drop to about 120. Under the Endangered Species Act, units using the range must now take concrete steps to reduce the impact of their activities. Without this tight regulatory supervision, activists fear compliance will slip.

Meanwhile, the Navy continues to seek a permit for its Low-Frequency Active Sonar technology, despite evidence linking it to the March 2000 stranding deaths of 16 whales in the Bahamas. "There's so much we don't know about the effects of sound on [whales], yet all along, the Navy has tried to justify rather than look at the problem," says Mark Palmer of the International Marine Mammal Project in San Francisco.

The Navy is also smarting from a March court ruling that halted its practice-fire activities on Farallon de Medinilla, a small island in the Pacific. The judge noted that a required permit under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act had never been sought despite numerous bird deaths. The Navy has appealed the ruling, and has since been granted an injunction. Says Peter Galvin from the Center for Biological Diversity, one of two plaintiffs in the case, the Navy is "attempting to avoid compliance with one of the world's first and most important wildlife protection treaties."

Most environmental laws already contain specific provisions for emergency military waivers, but the time clearly seemed ripe for the DOD to seek broader regulatory relief. So far, though, they haven't made a very strong case. On May 16, the General Accounting Office testified to Congress that the military has not demonstrated any real need for changes. Perhaps this explains why the proposal's House sponsors employed stealth tactics to make the last-minute changes, denying critics their own chance to testify.

Taylor worries that the military's legislative offensive threatens not only air, water and wildlife, but basic principles of accountability and equality under the law. But, he says, "this has galvanized the environmental community into action." ■

FREDERICK M. BROWN / NEWSMAKERS



## Banana Busters

### Ecuador's plantation workers fight back

By David Bacon

HACIENDA LOS ÁLAMOS, ECUADOR—Bonita, the word for beautiful in Spanish, is not a bad description for the nearly flawless fruit in the bins at fruit and vegetable markets across the country. But it is not the word used by hundreds of workers to describe their experience growing, harvesting and packing Bonita fruit.

The label belongs to Alvaro Noboa, owner of the largest banana export company in Ecuador and a candidate for president in Ecuador's coming elections. Workers at his Los Álamos Hacienda plantation, near the Pacific coast of Ecuador, say he is using his position as the country's largest banana grower and his enormous political power to launch physical attacks on them and stop them from challenging pervasive low wages, child

labor and intensive pesticide exposure.

In early March, 1,400 workers formed a union on seven Noboa plantations in Hacienda Los Álamos. They asked for what was already required by law: enrollment in Ecuador's national health care system, payment equal to the national minimum wage, and recognition for their union.

Company reaction was swift. Some 124 workers were fired almost immediately. Others on temporary contract were told there was no more work. Efforts to negotiate with Noboa got nowhere, and after three more union activists were fired, the workers walked out on strike on May 6.

In late evening on May 15, 400 hooded men armed with rifles arrived at one of the plantations in a Noboa company truck. Jan Nimmo, a Scottish observer for BananaLink (an international organization supporting banana workers), described what strikers told her: "They banged on the doors with rifle butts and dragged workers from their beds, kicking and hitting them. They [took them] in truckloads to the radio office, where they were forced to squat with their heads down and their hands behind their backs.

They were beaten and insulted and ... told that they were being taken to be killed and dumped in the river."

When strikers tried to resist, many were shot. The leg of 26-year-old Mauro Romero was later amputated as a result. On the second night, the armed men shot at strikers again, wounding more. A large police contingent finally arrived later that night, but strikers who were living in company housing on the plantations were expelled, and strikebreakers brought in to restart production.

Xavier Monge, a spokesman for the company, told reporters on June 1 that the strike was over and that the company had resumed harvesting bananas on the plantations. But the workers are still locked out, and the company has kept its strikebreakers.

One out of every four bananas sold in the United States is harvested in Ecuador, and the country is now the world's largest banana exporter. Its non-union status is the big attraction. Over 90 percent of the banana workers in Colombia and Panama belong to unions, as do 40 percent of Guatemala's workers. A miniscule 1 percent of Ecuador's 150,000-strong work force is organized.

In the Noboa strike, however, children have the most to lose. According to a recent report from Human Rights Watch, the average daily wage of a banana worker in Ecuador is \$5.44, or 41 cents below the legal minimum. The combined income of two working adults barely covers basic needs, so families need the income that children can bring in just to survive. The average age at which children go to work is 11.

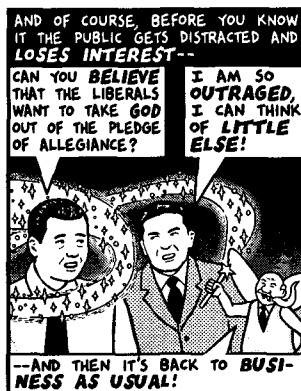
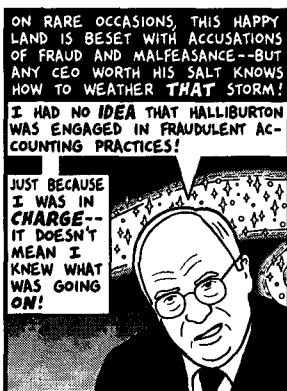
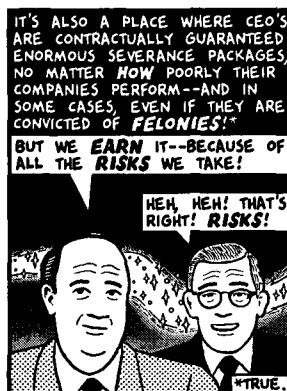
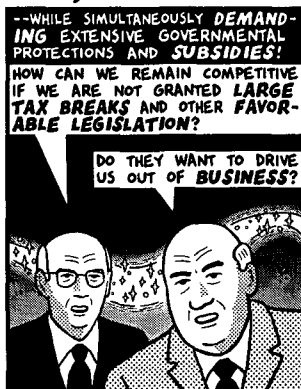
Work on banana plantations also exposes children to diazinon and chlorpyrifos, pesticides so hazardous the EPA has banned them in the United States. The EPA cautions that they are especially dangerous to children, even in low doses.

Unions in the United States have protested the strikers' treatment. The Teamsters, Longshore Workers, AFL-CIO President John Sweeney and members of Congress have expressed concern to Noboa and the huge Costco grocery chain, which sells Noboa bananas.

The final word, however, could come from U.S. consumers, who may begin to treat Bonita with the same disdain they reserved for table grapes two decades ago. ■

## THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



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## Clinic Crisis

Thanks to federal funding, anti-choice "pregnancy centers" are on the rise

By Eleanor Bader

"Roe v. Wade will never be repealed. Right to Lifers need to concentrate their entire efforts ... on the preservation of the offense of the life movement—the local crisis pregnancy center," an opinion column in the largest-circulation Christian newspaper in the country, the *Christian Times*, counseled in February.

Crisis pregnancy centers (CPCs) are anti-choice "clinics" that promise free pregnancy tests and counseling, but deliver wildly inaccurate information about the emotional and physical risks of abortion to the women who visit them. Largely marketed to the poor and the young, CPCs pretend to be bona fide medical centers, complete with staff in white uniforms, but are rarely staffed by trained personnel.

Instead, they lure in the unsuspecting and show them videos featuring emotionally traumatized women to bolster their

claim that abortion "hurts women." Located throughout the 50 states, they currently outnumber legitimate family planning and abortion clinics by 4-to-3. And that's not even the worst of it.

Thanks to a provision in the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, the federal government will spend \$102 million in fiscal year 2002, and \$135 million in 2003, on abstinence education—the teaching of chastity before marriage and fidelity thereafter. While many groups have offered their pedagogical prowess to the feds, dozens of conservative and religious organizations and CPCs have been granted approximately \$20 million a year since 2001 to do the job.

Abstinence money now allows CPC staff to lecture in public schools. Says Elizabeth Cavendish, legal director of the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League (NARAL): "This reflects a growing trend. The government is trying to strengthen the provider arm of the anti-choice movement. CPCs are no longer sitting passively and waiting for

women to come into their offices for pregnancy tests."

CPCs link abortion to breast cancer, depression and physical illness, among other graphically described problems, and can greatly distort or exaggerate its effects. Stephanie Mueller, former director of public policy at the National Abortion Federation (NAF), a provider network, says that clinics have to train staff to deal with

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A typical phone book ad for a fake "pregnancy clinic."

the damage wrought by CPCs. "If a woman comes into a clinic and says she's afraid she'll die or bleed to death from an abortion, or if she says she's scared she'll be unable to have children in the future, we ask if she's been to a crisis pregnancy center. Over the 30 years that CPCs have existed, we've

## Leader of the Pack

California has again taken the lead in the country's fight to improve environmental standards and reduce global warming, passing a landmark auto emissions bill in late June that will require auto manufacturers to significantly reduce carbon dioxide and other "greenhouse gas" emissions. As *In These Times* went to press, the bill was expected to be signed by California Gov. Gray Davis within days.

California represents a huge market for auto manufacturers, and as such, it has the potential to change the auto industry throughout the country, if not the world. The bill asks the state's Air Resources Board to develop a plan for the "maximum feasible reduction" in greenhouse-gas auto emissions and global warming pollutants by 2005. Automakers will have complete flexibility to decide how they comply with those regulations, which would go into effect in 2009, but it is unlikely they will be able to do so without drastically improving the fuel economy of average cars and trucks, perhaps by moving to hybrid vehicles.

The bill comes after an effort to improve national standards for fuel economy, sponsored by Sens. John McCain (R-Arizona) and John Kerry (D-Massachusetts), failed in Congress this spring. Yet 81 percent of Californians support reducing auto emissions, according to a poll conducted in June, and the measure has received nationwide support.

"We're thrilled," said Nancy Ryan of the group Environmental Defense. "This will be a shot heard round the world."

## No Improvement

BY KRISTIE REILLY

Afghanistan's much-anticipated loya jirga is over, but Afghan women, perhaps unsurprisingly, seem not to have benefited at all.

The now official Afghan president, Hamid Karzai, reserved 160 of the more than 1,000 seats in the loya jirga for women. The process even saw a woman run for president for the first time in Afghan history—Masuda Jalal, a professor; she received 171 votes. But women were subjected to intense intimidation and harassment throughout the 10-day meeting, and Afghanistan's appointed minister of women's affairs, Sima Samar, resigned.

Samar said she feared for her life after a newspaper ran a headline calling her Afghanistan's Salman Rushdie, the author who was targeted as an apostate by Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini. The paper accused her of saying she did not believe in Sharia law. Samar vehemently denied the charge and told the Associated Press, "I don't want to leave. That's the easiest way."

Samar has taken a lower position as head of Afghanistan's human rights commission and requested government protection, which has reportedly not been provided. Karzai has yet to appoint her replacement.

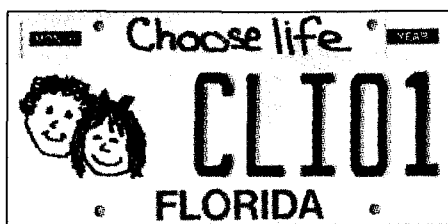
The imam of Kabul's main mosque was quoted during the meeting as saying women were not capable of participating in government. "A woman cannot be elected leader of an Islamic country because women are unintelligent, and their election as leader endangers the country," Qari Ubaidurrahman Qarizada said. "The views of women have to be heard by others [men] to see whether or not they are rational."



learned to identify women who've been emotionally traumatized and have developed counseling methods to help them."

This, of course, has not fazed conservative lawmakers. Heartbeat International, a "life-saving ministry" with affiliates in 47 states and 19 countries, was awarded nearly \$1 million in federal funding for CPCs in Arizona, Ohio and Tennessee. Likewise, CPCs have received funds to bring "the message of sexual purity" and "abstinence until marriage" to Colorado and Michigan. What's more, Delaware, Missouri and Pennsylvania now make direct appropriations of state funds to local CPCs.

Other localities have found different, but equally effective, ways to support crisis pregnancy groups. During the past several years legislators in nearly half the states have proposed bills to allow drivers to purchase "Choose Life" license plates for a surcharge—ranging from \$20 and \$50—earmarked for CPCs. Although Florida is the sole state with an operative program—to date it has raised more than \$650,000 for



An optional Florida license plate.

centers—five others, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma and South Carolina, have passed "Choose Life" bills. All four are presently stayed by litigation. Nonetheless, the legislation remains popular; this year alone, 24 proposals were considered by 14 states.

"Ironically, the arguments that have been most successful in stopping these bills have had nothing to do with abortion," says Cristine Nardi, staff attorney at NARAL. "In one state the police argued that they were afraid the tags would provoke road rage. In some states, people have said that if you're going to sanction

this message you also have to sanction a pro-choice viewpoint. This tactic tends to shut the antis up and stops their efforts."

NARAL has also argued that money should not go to organizations that provide inaccurate information or that are unlicensed to practice medicine. But Nardi concedes that states are eager to support CPCs. As of April, she says, 30 bills geared to bolstering the centers were pending in 16 states.

Several attempts have been made to rein in the deceptive practices of crisis pregnancy centers. Earlier this year, New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer investigated 24 state CPCs, reaching an agreement with one and continuing to pressure others. False or misleading CPC practices have also been challenged in Texas, Massachusetts and California. In each instance, the centers have been forced to disclose the nature of their operations to both callers and walk-in visitors. "We think it's basic," says Mueller. "Government should not fund groups that give women misleading information." ■

## ((( (( ( ( ( ( ( APPALL-O-METER ) ) ) ) ) ) )

### TIPS Calculator 7.8

One of President Bush's nifty new national security ideas is the Terrorism Information and Prevention System, or TIPS, which in its "pilot" stage aims to enlist a million Americans to snoop for international bad men in 10 American cities. Prime candidates for tipsters are mail carriers, utility employees, truck drivers, and other regular guys. Writing in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Ritt Goldstein points out that if the program's pilot goals are met, 1 million operatives will invigilate urban areas of the country with a population of 24 million. One in 24: that's a higher stoolie-to-citizen ratio than the East Germans managed with their fabled Stasi.

### A Touch of Glass 2.3

What's the perfect date movie for wan, bespectacled know-it-alls flirting with neoconservatism? Well, how about a flick about their

favorite magazine, *The New Republic*, and its cleverest writer ever, the disgraced Stephen Glass?

Glass, enjoyed a run in the mid-'90s in the pages of TNR as a deadpan observer of all manner of American cultural grotesquerie. His tales of bond traders worshipping at an altar to Alan Greenspan, or of drug dealing at a convention of Young Republicans, were amusing, but, alas, make-believe. His colleagues were embarrassed when Glass was exposed as a liar (he was, incidentally, in charge of fact-checking for the magazine).

But will Glass's story make good box office? Lions Gate Films hopes so. They are set to shoot the film, titled *Shattered Glass* and directed by screenwriter Billy Ray, later this summer. The *Hollywood Reporter* has revealed that actor Greg Kinnear is on the verge of lending his star power to the proj-

ect. Kinnear may play the role of former TNR editor Charles Lane. Rumors have not been confirmed that John Travolta will play hotshot literary editor Leon Wieseltier.

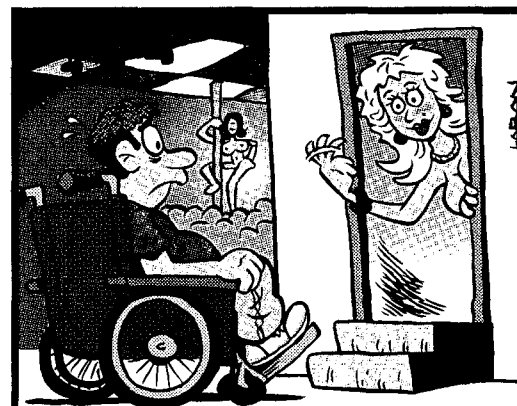
### Roll on the Wild Side 2.5

The differently abled get horny, too, and when they choose to blow off a little steam with a lap dancer they deserve the same privacy and amenities as the rest of us. So says Orlando, Florida, quadriplegic Edward Law in his lawsuit against the Wild-side Adult Sports Cabaret in West Palm Beach. According to the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, Law could not

reach the private room set aside for lap dances and had to have his performed out in the open.

That, says attorney Anthony Brady Jr., is the equivalent of being made to go to the bathroom in public. Brady contends strip clubs have ignored the Americans with Disabilities Act and refused to make their bathrooms wheelchair-accessible or set aside parking spaces for the disabled.

Law is also suing another area club, the Landing Strip.



## To the Extreme

### A new Russian law shuts down Kremlin opposition

By Fred Weir

Moscow—Russia's parliament has passed a tough new Kremlin-authored law against extremism that opposition forces fear is designed to provide legal cover for a looming crackdown on all independent political activity.

The law, which will enable police to summarily shut down any organization deemed "extremist," was rushed through the legislative process in barely three weeks and passed on June 27—record time for the normally sluggish Duma, Russia's Kremlin-dominated lower house of parliament. President Vladimir Putin had ordered deputies not to leave for summer recess until they adopted this and several other "urgent" pieces of legislation.

Supporters of the law say it is needed to combat the explosive rise of violent racists, neofascists and Islamic fundamentalists in Russia. A spate of vicious attacks on non-white foreigners by skinheads, two anti-Semitic bombings and a downtown Moscow rampage by flag-waving soccer fans have recently focused public attention on the threat of right-wing mayhem. "People thought Hitler was just a freak, until it was too late," says Boris Reznik, a deputy with the pro-Kremlin United Russia Party. "We need to take action, urgently."

But activists from Russia's powerful Communist Party and many independent left-wing, environmental and global justice groups suspect the legislation is really aimed at them. "We're in favor of fighting fascism, racism and ethnic chauvinism, but these are all included in existing laws," says Tamara Pletneva, a Communist Party deputy. "Under this law, anyone who goes to a meeting and criticizes the president can be arrested and his organization shut down. The goal here is to silence all opposition."

The law's definitions of extremism include activities aimed at overthrowing the existing order, inciting racial or ethnic hatred, terrorism, displaying Nazi symbols, or forming illegal armed militias. Under the law, authorities will have the prerogative to immediately suspend any party, religious

group or non-governmental organization whose members are accused of extremism. Broadcasters, newspapers and Internet sites charged with disseminating extremist ideas can similarly be closed down.

The law also calls for creation of a new federal commission—in effect, a new police agency—to collect information on suspected extremists. Its only protective clause states that activities which "advocate legitimate rights and freedoms" cannot be construed as extremism, as long as they are carried out legally. But it also enshrines some more controversial defini-

Critics say existing laws to combat genuine extremism are not being implemented effectively. They point out that only 120 police were on hand to supervise some 8,000 drunken soccer fans watching a June 9 World Cup game on a giant screen near the Kremlin. It took hours for cops to mobilize and contain the riot after the Russian team lost.

"Events leave us in no doubt about whom the authorities consider extremists," says Maxim Kuchinsky, a leader of Rainbow Keepers, a left-wing environmental group. Kuchinsky was one of 200



Russian soccer fans rampage in front of the Duma in Moscow.

tions of extremism that might be stretched to apply to almost any legitimate opposition, such as "jeopardizing the security of Russia," "humiliating national dignity" and "hooliganism and acts of vandalism."

Oleg Shein, an independent Duma deputy and trade-union activist, says Russia's flagging economic growth, rising inflation and a looming wave of tough market reforms explain the Kremlin's urgent desire for these new provisions. "There is a flowing tide of social disaffection over stagnating incomes and rising prices, and this has the authorities worried," Shein says. "Rather than let society organize itself, with independent trade unions and other grassroots protest groups, the Kremlin has opted for old-fashioned repression of protest. The purpose of this law is not to battle extremism, but to crush public initiative."

anti-globalists who attempted to stage a peaceful rally on Moscow's Pushkin Square on May 28. About 2,000 specially equipped riot police quickly closed in on the protesters, arresting 27 and dispersing the rest. Organizers say they had obtained a legal permit, but it was cancelled at the last moment because the demonstration "interfered with the work of city authorities." Says Kuchinsky: "The police got ahead of themselves. It was not legal to ban a meeting on those grounds at that time. But under the new law, it will be."

Says Boris Kagarlitsky, a left-wing sociologist: "Extremist attitudes are commonly found among Russian officials and police themselves. That's why they can't be trusted to define extremism, or to implement any law that gives them unlimited power to fight against it." ■

OLEG NIKSHIN / GETTY



BY BRETT SCHAEFFER

# Minority Reporter

**A**ward-winning investigative journalist Greg Palast spent the past five years in London reporting for both the *Guardian* and *Observer* newspapers and BBC television. A former legal investigator, Palast says he went overseas because the American media were no longer reporting investigative stories but simply regurgitating the party line, whether it was coming from Washington or corporate leaders.

His new book, *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy*, is a collection of Palast's stories mostly unseen by American readers. Perhaps the most famous story he broke revealed how Florida's top officials cleared the state's voter rolls of faux felons, primarily African-Americans, during the 2000 elections. Thousands were listed in the state's computer records with phantom convictions—either before they were born or years into the future—and were subsequently prevented from voting.

In *These Times* spoke with Palast about the state of the American media in June.

**You've returned to live in the United States after five years in London. Why come back now?**

I'm an American. It's weird, you leave the country and you find yourself becoming a fucking patriot, because there are a lot of good things about America. ... America is like this weird hall of mirrors in which you see some of the most frightening things you can imagine and then, you know, "purple mountain majesties" in both the physical and moral sense. That's something the left should start thinking about: What's really wonderful about America? That's why I'm here. I'm an American. I like it.

**Let's talk about Florida. You reported—immediately after the 2000 presidential election—that the voting machines in different Florida counties were set differently. The machines in the predominantly white counties allowed voters to make a mistake and have a second chance to vote; in the predominantly black counties, a mistake on the ballot meant the vote was voided. Why was this story overlooked by most of the American press?**

The *Washington Post* said they looked at my stuff, and they didn't see anything serious. [In June], they finally run a story saying the machines were set two different ways. ... Extraordinary finding: In black counties you made a mistake, you couldn't vote again; in white counties you made a mistake, you vote again. So you had massive spoilage of black ballots. ... What I am concerned about [is that] once they uncovered this, they covered over it with a whole bunch of cockamammy stuff about why it's a policy problem, it's a voting-machine-reform problem. ... So they make it this issue of technical campaign reform. It's not. It's about all the ways you steal a vote.

**What's the status of Florida's gubernatorial elections in November?**

The 2002 race between Jeb Bush and probably Janet Reno is going to be the ugliest, nastiest race we've seen in a long time in the United States.

**Are you going to write about it?**

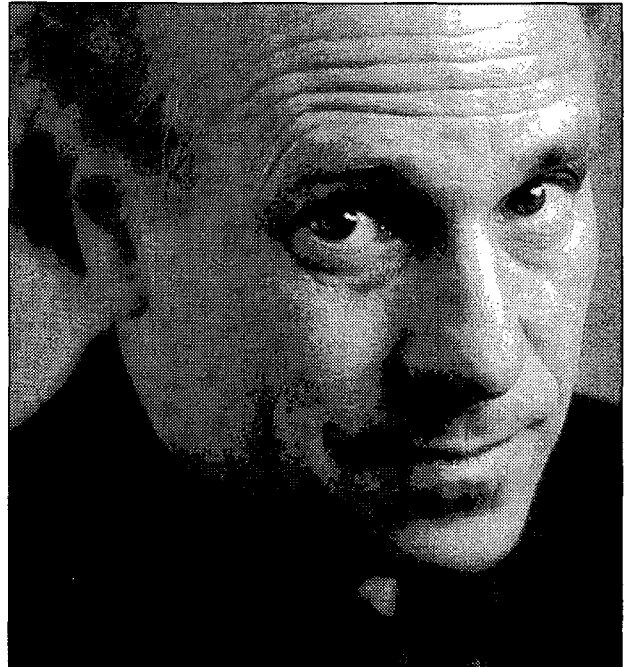
I intend to. I'm trying to nail down BBC television to send me back to Florida to cover the race. I want to do it as a documentary.

**What news outlet in the U.S. could you do that for?**

I think I'll try to go to mainstream papers. ... They don't go as far as I do by following out the path showing it was deliberate ... but are they going to let me report these stories? We'll see what happens. It'll be an interesting experiment. One of the criticisms of me, and I think I have to respond to it, is that I'm not around, and I don't try hard enough to get this stuff into the mainstream outlets.

**What's the problem with the American press?**

In Britain there are rules; they're written down. I don't like it. It's censorship. But



Greg Palast

that's the rule. ... In the United States, nothing's written down. We've got a free press. [It's] just [that] if you don't know where the invisible borders are, you can lose your fucking job. ...

Here's an example: Reading the *New York Times* the other day, Steven Greenhouse—a great labor reporter—does a front-page story about how Wal-Mart has been systematically not paying its workers ... [and] violating the wage laws. "You've clocked out, but now you've got to clean up the storeroom."

Was it wonderful for the *Times* to run that story on the front page? Yes. The problem? One: The story's 10 years old. Two: It says "lawsuit contends." The *New York Times* did nothing. ... They didn't say we discovered Wal-Mart's been doing this. They're saying someone's suing them for doing this.

So if you read that news carefully—what is probably one of their best reporters doing a praiseworthy report—even that is a piece of shit. And that's the *New York Times* at its best. ... So now what am I supposed to do? Ask these guys for a job? What do I do when they say, "What do you think of our paper?" [Laughing] It's not as soft as Charmin. ■

# Political Theater of the Absurd

By Susan J. Douglas

**W**hat is the big deal?" demanded an exasperated Robert Novak, the conservative syndicated columnist who also has his own TV show. George W. Bush's stock dealings back when he was with Harken Energy were "insignificant," Novak declared, and people should really move on.

My nephew has a name for such a mindset: aggressive ignorance.

In the past, in the midst of major social upheavals, television, particularly the news divisions, set on new courses to match the times. The nightly news went from 15 minutes to a half-hour in the early '60s in response to the drama of the civil rights movement. TV punditry included more right-wing voices with the rise of Reaganism. In the '90s, business programming soared on cable.

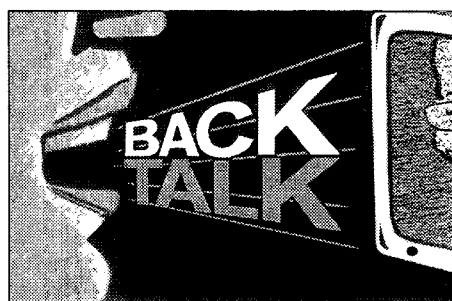
We deserve something quite different now, as this widespread collapse of faith in so many institutions—corporate America, the market, the FBI, the Catholic Church, the medical establishment—embitters increasing numbers of Americans. The corporate scandals in particular demonstrate how badly we need a recalibrated, more democratic, more thoughtful media right now. The '90s-style punditry—which we hated because it was so mean-spirited and full of propaganda—is now actually something worse in media terms: dated, utterly out of step with the times.

The current chapter in TV punditry promises to be simultaneously entertaining and depressing to watch. The ideology these neocon blabbers stand for is currently under siege, so we're in for some absurdist rationalizations that would no doubt fit well in an Ionesco play. Yet despite their inability to speak to our current disasters, the same pundits remain ensconced in a media system that will not dispense with them like yesterday's has-been sitcom pilot or *Survivor* contestant.

We have listened to these right-wing pundits over the years with great difficulty, trying without success to keep our blood pressure down as they blare on about poor people who deserve to be poor

because they embody a "poverty of values" or about how government regulation shackles entrepreneurial creativity and thus the human spirit.

One of my favorite rhetorical gambits of the '90s was when they talked about "the market" as if it were a person, some omniscient Buddha who knew all and would resolve everything. Remember when the market liked unemployment,



for example? They anthropomorphized economic trends and got away with it.

The venues in which these pundits appeared were pretty much all alike—the verbal food fight. *The McLaughlin Group* was never about promoting thoughtfulness; it was about who had the best soundbites and who could dis whom. Chris Matthews and Fox News have elevated this cultural form to newly unwatchable heights.

A recent example of the kind of television discourse we need, and how ill-suited the old-style neocon food-fighters are to it, appeared on the July 12 edition of *NOW with Bill Moyers* on PBS. Moyers featured a roundtable discussion among journalists and scholars about Islam and its relationship to the West in the wake of 9/11. The conversation explored a range of complicated issues: Islam's vexed relationship to modernity, Egypt's inner politics and its burgeoning youth movement, profound American misconceptions about what constitutes and informs Islamic fundamentalism, the centrality of the Palestinian struggle (and its representation on Al-Jazeera) to anti-American attitudes in Arab countries.

The discussants—who knew a great deal about Middle Eastern history, poli-

tics, culture and religion—listened thoughtfully to each other and also offered nuanced assessments and questions about the struggles within Islam to reconcile religious beliefs with political practices and regimes.

But one participant stood out like a sore thumb: right-wing columnist and TV pundit Charles Krauthammer, who started rudely interrupting people and saying such patently ignorant, even racist, things that the others were visibly shocked and repeatedly objected to his remarks. The real problem, according to Krauthammer's analysis, is that Islam is a bad religion that makes people do bad things. Other religions like Christianity or Judaism don't do this. He blamed the Arab world as the planet's main source of anti-Semitism. He had one main point: Islam bad. (In another segment of the discussion, he did make another point: America should invade Iraq right now.)

It is this kind of aggressive ignorance that we don't need and simply can't afford anymore. Whether considering the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, broader Mideast policy or the Enroning of America, we need something these pundits have driven from the public arena: sophistication.

As progressives criticize the narrow range of opinions available in the corpo-

**Mean-spirited '90s-style punditry is now actually something worse in media terms: dated, utterly out of step with the times.**

rate media, we should play down the charge of ideological bias. We should emphasize something else: These guys are has-beens from the last Gilded Age. They are now too out of touch, too unsophisticated, and, well, too dumb to make sense of the explosive issues before us. ■

*Susan J. Douglas is a professor of communications studies at the University of Michigan. She is the author of Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media and Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination.*



# Dithering Democrats

## The November forecast looks gloomy

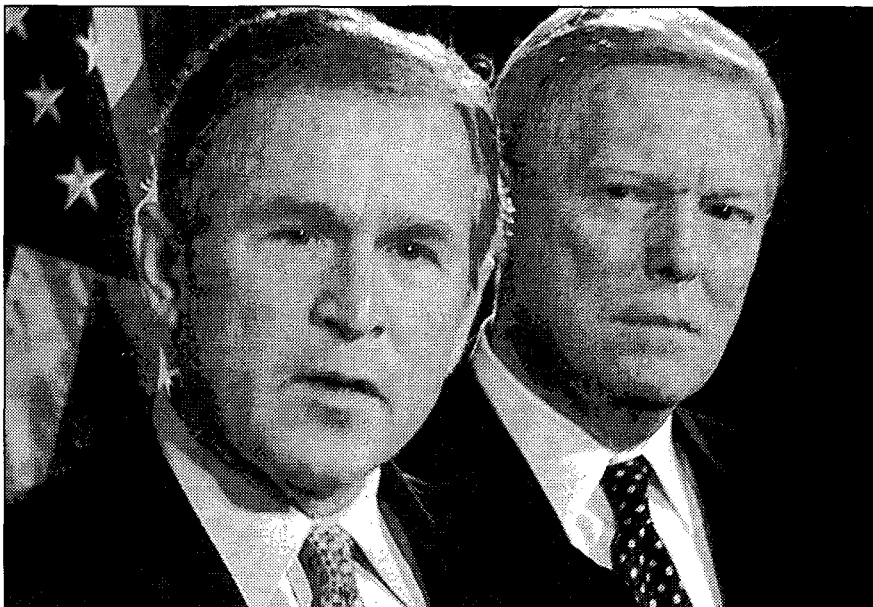
By Doug Ireland

More Vidal's dictum—"America has elections instead of politics"—has never been more true. As the bipartisan duopoly slouches toward November, the electorate appears by every measure to be deeply uninterested in the choices before it.

Just look at the record low participation in the 16 states that held primaries this spring. On average, only 16.2 percent of eligible voters bothered to go to the polls, a drop from the 1998 midterm elections (17.6 percent) and less than half the high-point primary participation in 1966. Nine of the states with early primaries this year reported the lowest turnouts ever. "No one should have expected that the events of September 11 would have increased political participation," says Curtis Gans, director of the Committee for the Study of the American Electorate. "What the citizenry was asked to do was to return to normalcy, consume material goods and invest in the stock market—hardly clarion calls to civic involvement. The only exhortation was for an increase in voluntarism—which tends to be a *noblesse oblige*, apolitical act."

The dreadful primary turnouts presage a low vote in November—and that's bad news for Democrats, who traditionally do better the higher the turnout. Worse, the highly regarded bipartisan "Battleground" poll, conducted by Democrat Celinda Lake and Republican Ed Goeas, not only confirms the lack of voter enthusiasm for the elections, but, in a survey released June 26, shows that Republican voters appear to be more motivated than Democratic ones. And there's little interest in the fall elections among two key Democratic constituencies: African-Americans and unmarried women. Lake calls it "the Bush effect—Republicans are more intense than Democrats."

Moreover, Republicans are making serious inroads among Latinos: Democratic pollster Sergio Bendixen's survey of Latino voters for the center-right New Democrat Network showed that 40 percent would be more likely to support a candidate endorsed by George Bush (who, Bendixen told the *Washington Post*, "has developed a warm rapport with Hispanics similar to the bond that Bill Clinton enjoyed with African-Americans"). And Bush's sharp tilt toward the murderous Ariel Sharon has driven many Jewish voters into the arms of the Republicans. Even a chunk of the gay vote is slipping away from the Democrats: The GOP got a third of it for Congress in 2000, according to exit polls of self-identified gays, and the opportunists who run the Human Rights Campaign—the nation's wealthiest and most



MARK WILSON / NEWSMAKERS

Instead of criticizing the president, the Democrats are lining up for photo-ops.

visible gay lobby—have distributed endorsements to a raft of GOP congressional candidates this year.

Despite the jingoistic mood in the country, Americans are beginning to understand that Bush's war on terrorism isn't working: A CNN/Gallup poll released July 10 reveals only 39 percent believe that the United States is winning the war on terrorism, while 43 percent say "neither" side is winning. But Bush is even more of a Teflon president than Ronald Reagan was—nothing seems to stick to him. That same poll showed 71 percent continue to approve of Bush's conduct of international affairs, and Bush's overall positive approval rating with three-quarters of the voters has remained pretty steady for the past several months in every major opinion survey.

Cowed by these numbers, Democrats have failed to exploit the openings that current events have given them. Afghanistan has returned to rampant warlordism, factional assassinations and drug dealing—the same conditions that gave rise to the Taliban in the first place. CIA footpad Hamid Karzai's interim government was "elected" by an unrepresentative *loya jirga* marked by widespread intimidation and death threats (and then immediately abolished the Ministry for Women's Affairs—belying the Bush argument that the war was fought for the emancipation of women). Not a single al-Qaeda cell or mole has been unearthed here by U.S. intelligence services, despite Bush's shredding of our civil liberties.

Al Gore finally emerged from hibernation, shaved his beard, and delivered a speech that was widely reported as a major attack on Bush. But on closer examination, Gore only made the rather common-sense observation that Bush had failed to capture Osama bin Laden, without ever dissecting the reasons for that failure. Dick Gephardt has given Bush a blank check to invade Iraq, as have Democratic presidential candidates Joe Lieberman and the "liberal" John Kerry. Some Democrats, like Georgia Sen. Max Cleland, are running TV spots featuring pictures of themselves with Bush. The campaign of Missouri's Jean Carnahan boasts that she votes with Bush 71 percent of the time. And the Democrats' Texas Senate candidate, Ron Kirk, is promising that "more times than not ... I'll be supportive of the president."

Even more glaring and indefensible has been the way Democrats have blown the opportunity to make serious political capital out of the corporate scandals. From the moment Enron imploded, the Democrats should have made it a central theme of the congressional campaign. But they failed to do so because there were too many Democrats in both houses who also had accepted piles of campaign cash from Ken Lay and his corporate crooks. If you set aside the \$2 million Enron gave in the 2000 presidential campaign, when Lay and his cronies tilted heavily to Bush, the remaining \$4 million given by the conglomerate to federal candidates since 1989 was almost evenly divided between Democrats and Republicans. Democrats also raked in boodle from Enron co-conspirator Arthur Andersen: More than half the House and 94 of 100 Senators took Andersen money in the past decade.

The same is true of WorldCom, which since 1989 has given \$7.6 million in soft money, PAC and individual contributions "spread evenly between the two national parties," according to the Center for Responsive Politics. In just the 2001-2002 period alone, WorldCom gave more than \$1 million, split equally between Democrats and Republicans. Global Crossing played the same game: 55 percent of its \$3.5 million since 1999 went to Democrats, 45 percent to the GOP. Terry McAuliffe, the bagman who chairs the DNC, got to buy pre-IPO shares in the company at an insider's price of \$100,000—and resold them before the company collapsed for an \$18 million profit.

In 2000, Democrats also helped scuttle the proposal by then SEC Chairman Arthur Levitt to ban accountants from simultaneously acting as consultants to the same firms they audited—this would have closed the loophole that motored Andersen's participation in the Enron crimes. And, of course, the accounting industry's puissant lobby—the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA)—gave more than \$8.5 million between 1989 and 2001, almost evenly divided between Democrats and Republicans.

Indeed, of the 46 members of Congress who wrote letters to the SEC opposing the Levitt proposal, the one who topped the list of legislators on the take was New York Democratic Sen. Chuck Schumer, who sucked in \$340,000 in campaign cash from AICPA and the "Big Five" largest accounting firms. So-called "liberal" Democratic congressmen, like Florida's Peter

Deutsch (\$131,198) and Connecticut's Jim Maloney (\$51,095), as well as "New Democrats" Ellen Tauscher (\$82,801) and Cal Dooley (\$65,000) of California, Washington's Adam Smith (\$21,500), and Virginia's Jim Moran (\$115,661) made the Top 25 list of those House members who took the most money from the accounting industry to help kill the reform proposal.

Of course, WorldCom's binge of fraudulently financed acquisitions that made it the planet's largest communications conglomerate took place during the corporate-coddling Clinton years, when Bubba turned the Lincoln Bedroom into a hot-sheet hotel room for corporate crooks, and put a virtual end to antitrust prosecutions (with the notable exception of Microsoft, whose Silicon Valley competitors had purchased Clinton and Gore's loyalty). In a July 10-11 CNN/Time poll, 40 percent blame Clinton for the corporate scandals, while only 33 percent blame Bush.

That helps explain why it took the brain-dead Democratic leadership so many long months after Enron's collapse last fall to get on the corporate reform bandwagon. When Tom Daschle and Dick Gephardt finally made a joint appearance to announce the Democratic alternative to Dubya's rhetorically strong but toothless speech on the issue, they did so at a podium decorated with the oxymoronic slogan, "Restore Corporate Trust and Integrity"—as if either virtue had ever been a hallmark of corporate America. (If the slogan had been "Put the Crooks in Jail," the Democrats might have had a better chance of arousing sleepy voters.)

The Democratic proposals were so weak—an oversight board, slightly longer jail terms in some cases—that they passed the Senate with unanimous or near-unanimous votes (the White House gave its backdoor approval to the GOP solons' votes for the Democratic amendments to protect them from charges of corporate-coddling in the fall campaign—knowing that Tom "The Hammer" DeLay and his lockstep House GOP troops would ensure an even

weaker final bill when it goes to the House-Senate conference). At the end of the first day's Senate voting, Daschle appeared on the *Jim Lehrer Newshour* to smilingly proclaim that "the differences are narrowing" between the Democrats and the White House—hardly a rallying cry for a Democratic victory in November.

The next day, Daschle even connived with the GOP to prevent a series of amendments to strengthen the reform bill, offered by Democrat Carl Levin and Republican John McCain, from coming to a floor vote. Among them: a proposal, supported by Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan, to count stock options as an expense against earnings in order to prevent companies from giving investors false information about corporate balance sheets—an effort, in other words, to eliminate the loophole that allowed the Enron crooks and their imitators to walk away with fortunes while their employees lost their retirement savings. Why was it quashed? The proposal was anathema to the high-tech execs who provided a huge chunk of the record \$45 million in soft and hard campaign cash the Democrats have raised so far this cycle. As McCain put it, "The fix is in."

We're in the biggest corporate crisis since 1932, the election is only four months away, and the Democrats still don't have a program to take to the country.



We're in the biggest corporate crisis since 1932, the election is only four months away, and the Democrats still don't have a program to take to the country," fumes Russ Hemenway, the veteran director of the National Committee for an Effective Congress. The NCEC calculates that there are only 37 House races in which the outcome is seriously in doubt. The Democrats need to pick up seven of those seats to retake control. (Democratic Rep. Ralph Hall of Texas has already announced that, in the event of a tie in the makeup of the new House next year, he'll vote with the Republicans to assure they preserve their majority.) And, Hemenway says grimly, "Taking seven seats will be like climbing Mount Everest."

Democratic chances of retaining their one-vote Senate control are shaky at best. Three Democratic incumbents are in serious danger: Minnesota's Paul Wellstone, Missouri's Carnahan and South Dakota's Tim Johnson; while the party's best chances of picking up GOP seats are against Colorado's Wayne Allard and Arkansas' Tim Hutchinson (although both are still leading in the polls). If New Hampshire's wacky Bob Smith is defeated in the Republican primary by Rep. John Sununu (son of Bush I's chief of staff), as seems likely, he'll probably retain the seat for the GOP. The only open Republican seat the Democrats have an outside chance to pick up is in Texas, where Kirk has a slim lead at the moment over his GOP opponent. But Georgia's Cleland and Iowa's Tom Harkin are both facing stiff GOP challenges.

On the state level, the only real Democratic bright spot this year is in Michigan, where state Attorney General Jennifer Granholm (who was arrested during college at an anti-apartheid sit-in) is poised to win the party's gubernatorial nomination and has a 2-1 lead over her ultra-right GOP opponent in the polls. But the news is bad for the Dems in other big states: California Gov. Gray Davis has yet to break 50 percent in any poll, his neg-

atives are higher than his positives, and his lead over his GOP opponent has been steadily narrowing (in a race in which Davis' frantic corporate shakedowns for campaign cash have become a major issue). New York Gov. George Pataki, having bought off half the labor movement and a big slice of the Latino vote, will handily defeat whichever of the two Democrats wins the September primary (barring an unexpected November breakthrough by a wealthy independent, deficit hawk Tom Golisano). And Florida Gov. Jeb Bush will romp to victory over Janet Reno if, as the polls suggest, she wins her primary.

And what of the Greens? Ralph Nader, who inexplicably hibernated for six months after the 2000 elections—throwing away a chance to turn his legions of volunteers into an effective electoral fighting force while their enthusiasm was at its peak—resurfaced for the first time in months on TV news on the same day the WorldCom thieves were taking the Fifth. And where was dear Ralph? In Havana, warmly greeting Fidel—at a time when he should have been in Washington leading the charge against corporate fraud. These issues are Nader's meat and potatoes, but the man has the political timing of an aardvark.

Moreover, while the Greens are right to run gubernatorial candidates against Democratic mediocrities in places like New York—where working-class intellectual Stanley Aronowitz, a well-known figure on the left, is carrying the party's banner with the feisty slogan "Tax and spend!"—it's bad strategy and bad politics for the party to put up a candidate against Minnesota's Wellstone, the Senate's most progressive member. The Green vote could ensure Wellstone's defeat in a terribly close race, exposing the alternative party to ridicule (and properly so). Don't look for any Green breakthroughs this year.

All in all, this election cycle looks so dismal that, as Hemenway puts it, "one wants to avert one's eyes." ■

Where was Ralph  
Nader on the day the  
WorldCom thieves  
were taking the Fifth?  
In Havana, warmly  
greeting Fidel.

## The Incumbent-Protection Racket

By Steven Hill

**T**oters, beware. Redistricting, the once-a-decade swindle whereby incumbent politicians redraw the lines of their own legislative districts to guarantee themselves safe seats, is just about completed in all 50 states.

This time around the "incumbent protection" racket was even more crass than usual.

The *Wall Street Journal* reports that out of 53 U.S. House districts, only 11 races are true "toss-ups" that either side could win. Congressional analysts generally have narrowed the field of play to 30 to 40 races.

Most are essentially done deals. Incumbents took no chances. Consider Rep.

Loretta Sanchez, who told the *Orange County Register* that she and most of her California House colleagues each forked over \$20,000 to the political consultant in charge of gerrymandering the district lines. The money was classic "protection money." "\$20,000 is nothing to keep your seat," Sanchez said. "I spend \$2 million [campaigning] every election."

Voters don't even need to show up to the polls anymore. And guess what? They won't. There probably won't be a single close general election for Congress in such major states as Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, Texas, New Jersey and New York. California has only one race out of 53 considered a toss-up.

One consequence of the lack of competition is that a handful of races will determine

which political party wins control of the House. Party leaders and their redistricting consultants have been strategizing over the political map like it's a military battlefield. And they do it with increasingly powerful computers, mapping software and databases that allow them to slice and dice the election. Then they flood the close races with tons of money, while ignoring those races already locked up. "A lot of money will flow to a relative handful of seats," says Burdett Loomis, a political scientist at the University of Kansas. "In those seats, it's nuclear war. Twenty miles away, there's nothing."

This year raised "incumbent protection" to a whole new level. The current round of ger-

# A Few Good Candidates

From likely winners to long shots,  
here are 10 to watch in 2002

By John Nichols

Rarely in recent history has the political landscape been so ill-defined in the summer before an election. America is at war, sort of, in Afghanistan and a half-dozen other backwaters—and the lone superpower is rattling its sabers in Iraq's direction. The domestic economy has a cold that might turn out to be pneumonia. George W. Bush has high approval ratings, yet almost half the Americans polled say his laxness toward corporate corruption is threatening the nation's stability.

There's an opening here for the sort of upheavals seen in 1966, 1974, 1982 and 1994, when opposition parties grabbed substantial ground from a president and his party. That is certainly the hope of Democrats, who dream of expanding their control over the Senate, retaking the House, and grabbing a majority of statehouses for the first time in a decade. But there are no guarantees that will happen—nor is there any certainty that Democratic control of federal or state positions will open the door to a new progressive era.

The question of whether liberal Democrats or progressive third-party activists prevail in this November's midterm elections, and whether their successes will have significant meaning from a policy standpoint, comes down to hundreds of individual races across the country. Every election brings out a crop of new candidates who have the potential not just to improve the elec-

tion statistics for their party, but to shift the discourse in a dramatically different direction. Think Paul Wellstone and Bernie Sanders in 1990, Russ Feingold and Cynthia McKinney in 1992, or Dennis Kucinich in 1996.

Here are 10 of the progressive contenders worth watching as the 2002 campaign gears up:



## KENDRICK MEEK, FLORIDA

Rarely does the decision by the child of a prominent elected official to seek the position being vacated by his retiring parent cause much excitement. But like his mother, U.S. Rep. Carrie Meek, a pioneering civil rights activist and African-American political leader, Kendrick Meek has a track record as a fierce fighter for social and economic justice causes.

A key player in protests that challenged Florida Gov. Jeb Bush's attempts to eliminate affirmative action in that state, Kendrick Meek put together a massive African-American voter registration drive that won the state for Al Gore. And while most Democrats failed to aggressively challenge the Republican theft of that election, the Meeks were in the forefront of the movement to get every vote counted. Young, smart and coura-

rymandering may be the most anti-democratic ever. We like to think of ours as a two-party system, when in fact for most voters it's a one party system—the party that dominates their district. Demography is destiny, it turns out.

Even more than campaign-finance inequities, this incumbent-protection racket is responsible for creating uninspiring elections where voters have little choice. If you are a Democrat in a solidly Republican district, a Republican in a solidly Democratic district, or a supporter of a minor party, you don't have a chance of electing your candidate of choice, no matter how much money she spends.

All is not lost. In Arizona, an initiative led by Common Cause and the League of Women Voters took redistricting out of the hands of incumbents and

gave it to an independent, nonpartisan commission. In Illinois, citizen groups are leading a "drive to revive" cumulative voting, which would get rid of winner-take-all districts entirely and use three-seat districts that won't require redistricting. Illinois used such a system from 1870 to 1980 to elect its lower house, and nearly every district had two-party representation. More competition meant more choices for voters, and less control by party machines.

Other efforts for reforms like instant runoff voting (IRV) promise to restore to voters some of the choice they have lost as a result of redistricting shenanigans. With IRV, voters get to indicate their runoff choices at the same time as their first choice by ranking their ballot. San Francisco voters recently voted to elect all local offices using IRV starting next year. In Vermont, voters in 52 towns

endorsed an advisory proposal to the state government to use IRV for statewide elections. On August 27, Alaska voters will vote to decide if they want to use IRV to elect most of their state and all of their federal elected officials, including the president.

Our "winner take all" political system now produces the lowest voter turnout in the world among established democracies. Many would-be voters know the system is broken. It's time that we consider reforms that not only will liberate our democracy from redistricting battles, but empower voters to choose their representatives—and not the other way around.

Steven Hill, western regional director of the Center for Voting and Democracy, is the author of *Fixing Elections: The Failure of America's Winner Take All Politics* ([www.FixingElections.com](http://www.FixingElections.com)).



geous, Kendrick Meek has emerged as a genuine leader for progressive principles as a senator in the Florida legislature, and there is little doubt that he would do the same in Congress.



#### **BILL CURRY, CONNECTICUT**

Eight years ago, populist Bill Curry came within a whisker of being elected governor of Connecticut. Only the national Republican landslide prevented him from becoming the most progressive governor in the nation. Now Curry is back to "prosecute the case" against conservative Republican Gov. John Rowland, the man who beat him by three percentage points in 1994. Curry is out front on the issues, pushing environmental protection, progressive tax policies and reform of a scandal-plagued state government.

Perhaps more important, Curry convinced a likely primary foe, state Senate Majority Leader George Jensen, to join the Democratic ticket as the candidate for lieutenant governor. The

### Chellie Pingree's challenge to uninspiring Republican incumbent Sen. Susan Collins is the sleeper race of 2002.

Curry-Jensen ticket is "the best Democratic gubernatorial tandem in recent memory," says *Hartford Courant* columnist Stan Simpson. The Connecticut Democrats still face an uphill race against the popular Rowland, who Simpson notes "will paint Curry as a wild-eyed, free-spending liberal." But if Democrats are to claim a clear majority of statehouses, the heavily Democratic states of Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts present them with precisely the sort of races they must win.



#### **MARTHA FULLER CLARK, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

A veteran Democratic state legislator, Martha Fuller Clark got little support from the political gurus in Washington when she ran for Congress two years ago. Yet she still pulled together a remarkable campaign that held popular incumbent John Sununu to just 53 percent of the vote. This year, with Sununu running for the Senate, and with Democratic leaders and labor groups fully on board, Clark is waging a smart, progressive campaign that is way ahead of the national Democrats when it comes to taking tough stands on controversial issues.

Even before the recent round of corporate scandals put business ethics in the spotlight, Clark was a noisy advocate for corporate responsibility. One of her priorities if elected will be the fight to end corporate tax evasion: "The honest taxpayer is paying more each year in taxes than he or she should to pay for the taxes that these corporations are avoiding." Clark also wants to close loopholes that have hindered efforts to secure equal pay for women. "Women are taxed at the same rate as men," she points out, promising to make paycheck fairness an issue in Congress. "Clearly, they deserve to be paid at the same rate as men."



#### **CHELLIE PINGREE, MAINE**

The loss of just one Democratic seat in the Senate would effectively give control of the chamber back to the Republicans. With several Democratic incumbents showing vulnerabilities, Democrats must get serious about picking up seats if they want to maintain the ability to block at least some of the Bush agenda. Tom Daschle calls former state Senate President Chellie Pingree's challenge to uninspiring Republican incumbent Susan Collins the sleeper race of 2002.

He's right. Pingree played a critical role in her state's challenge to drug company price-gouging and in moves to dramatically increase the minimum wage. She's also a sharp political strategist who outmaneuvered other Democrats to secure her party's nomination without a primary fight. If she wins this one, she would not only shore up the majority, but also energize the progressive wing of the Democratic caucus in the Senate.



#### **JONATHAN CARTER, MAINE**

Maine voters are among the most independent in the country—they gave Ross Perot some of his best showings in 1992 and 1996 and provided Ralph Nader with a high level of support in 2000. More significantly, the state elected independent governors in the '70s and '90s. That gives gubernatorial candidate Jonathan Carter plenty of ammunition to argue that Maine should be the breakthrough state for the Green Party this year.

Under Maine's Clean Elections Act, Carter collected a sufficient number of citizen signatures and \$5 contributions to qualify for as much as \$900,000 in public financing. Running against conservative Republican Peter Cianchette and centrist Democrat John Baldacci, Carter is positioning himself as the clear progressive in the multi-candidate race—pushing not just an environmental agenda, but innovative economic strategies to promote sustainable development. Carter's serious, issue-oriented and well-financed campaign is "not about making a statement," he says—he's in the race to win.

Even with public financing money, that'll be a tall order. Democrats, who fear Carter will take just enough votes to tip the election to the Republicans, tried to block his access to the Clean Elections money. But that move appears to have backfired. Says Bowdoin College political scientist Christian Potholm: "You don't have to be a Green or a left-wing Democrat to say, 'Hey, wait a minute, one of the big parties is picking on this person who went out and got these signatures.'"



#### **DARIO HERRERA, NEVADA**

First elected to the Nevada legislature at age 23 and chairman of the powerful Clark County (Las Vegas) Board of Commissioners by 27, Dario Herrera, now 29, is well positioned to win what will be one of this year's hardest fought congressional races. As a state legislator, Herrera sponsored a number of initiatives to expand access to health care and provide more funding for education, and he now enjoys strong backing from

unions, progressive groups such as Americans for Democratic Action and Latino activists. If he wins the open seat in Nevada's Third District, he will be well-placed to emerge as one of the most prominent "next generation" leaders within the national Democratic Party.



#### **JOHN NORRIS, IOWA**

The former director of the rabble-rousing Iowa Farm Unity Coalition and co-founder of the Stop the Arms Race Political Action Committee (STARPAC), John Norris is mounting an impressive grassroots campaign that has a very real chance of displacing a vulnerable Republican incumbent. He's pushing a lot of this year's standard Democratic agenda—preserve Social Security, develop a genuine prescription drug benefit, protect the environment—but he's also talking tough about the need to prevent corporate agribusiness from wiping out remaining family farmers.

And at a time when many Democrats are afraid to speak up about Department of Defense boondoggles, Norris is unabashed in his criticism of President Bush's National Missile Defense scheme. "Making the United States a safe and secure nation should be our government's top priority," he says, "but Star Wars leads us right back into an arms race. We have got to learn that in the race for nuclear superiority, everyone loses."



#### **RON KIRK, TEXAS**

No victory would be sweeter or more significant for Democrats than that of former Dallas Mayor Ron Kirk in his race for the Senate seat vacated by right-wing Republican Phil Gramm. A Kirk victory would cushion the Democratic majority, add the first black face to the Senate since the defeat of U.S. Sen. Carol Moseley-Braun in 1998, and embarrass Bush in his own backyard.

Several recent polls have shown Kirk leading in what promises to be one of the most expensive and hard-fought Senate races of 2002. Bush will pull out all the stops for Republican state Attorney General John Cornyn, but Kirk will benefit from an unprecedented turnout of African-American and Latino voters for a Democratic "rainbow" ticket that also includes businessman Tony Sanchez for governor. The rainbow strategy, which has been pushed by Texas AFL-CIO strategists, seeks to pump up turnout by minority, union and traditionally progressive voting blocs to offset the political power of the Bush machine and its religious-right allies. Republicans are so furious with—and frightened by—the strategy that one Cornyn aide denounced it as a "racial quota system." But it could become a model for Democrats in states with growing African-American and Latino populations.



#### **STEPHANIE HERSETH, SOUTH DAKOTA**

To take back the House, Democrats must post a net gain of seven seats. In a year with few genuinely competitive contests, they will need a surprise win by someone like Stephanie Herseeth. The 31-year-old has proven to be an unexpectedly strong candidate for her state's open seat. Herseeth, whose grandfather served as South Dakota's governor and whose grandmother was secretary of state, beat several senior Democrats to take the party's nomination for an open House seat. And she appears to be holding her own in a high-stakes contest with Republican nominee Bill Janklow—who is twice her age and began his political career before she was born.

Herseeth, a graduate of Georgetown Law School, is scoring points as a modern-day prairie populist willing to take on corporate agribusiness and the lobbyists who push free trade schemes like NAFTA. Where some farm-state Democrats remain unquestioning backers of free trade schemes, Herseeth bluntly calls for a new direction. "Undeniably, NAFTA has had devastating effects on our state's manufacturing and agriculture industries," she says. "I believe that free trade must also be fair trade, and I will work hard to ensure that our federal trade negotiators effectively represent the interests of individual South Dakota workers, farmers and ranchers, not just large corporate interests."

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Anthony Pollina's candidacy may well be the savviest attempt by an independent running anywhere in the country this year to win elective office—and then use that office to build a statewide progressive political movement.

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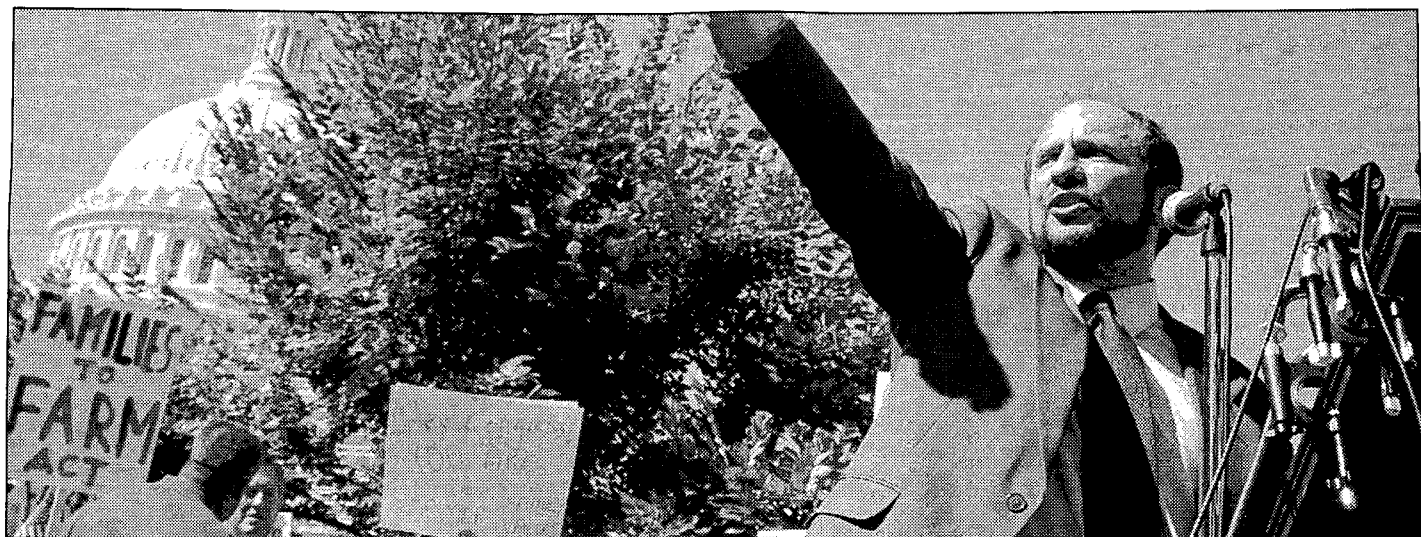


#### **ANTHONY POLLINA, VERMONT**

Two years ago, Anthony Pollina was the Vermont Progressive Party's nominee for governor. He wowed debate audiences and earned a credible 10 percent of the vote. This year, he's skipping the high-profile, high-spending and highly partisan race to replace retiring Democratic Gov. Howard Dean. Instead, Pollina is running for the state's No. 2 job. "I will redefine the office of Lieutenant Governor as an advocate for the people of Vermont," he says.

Pollina wants to use the state's second-highest elective post as a bully pulpit to push for health care for all, a statewide living wage, clean government reforms and sustainable development. Winning the No. 2 post would also help Pollina to position the Progressive Party—which currently holds four state legislative seats—as a viable alternative at the statewide level to the Democrats and Republicans. In that sense, Pollina's candidacy may well be the savviest attempt by an independent progressive running anywhere in the country this year to win elective office—and then use that office to build a statewide progressive political movement. ■





# Third Time's the Challenge

## Targeted by the White House, Paul Wellstone may face his toughest race yet

By David Moberg

Sen. Paul Wellstone admits his re-election race will be close. After all, he won both of his previous races with around 50 percent of the vote, and the state's political climate has changed since then. Plus, the White House has targeted him this time, pouring money into the campaign of Republican Norm Coleman. But Wellstone remains confident.

Part of the reason why was sitting in a Minneapolis office earlier this summer. Nearly 75 college-age volunteers from Minnesota and around the country—part of a much larger corps of full- and part-time volunteers—were getting a quick lesson in grassroots organizing from campaign manager Jeff Blodgett. Blodgett, a former student of Wellstone's when he taught political science at Carleton College, told them they would be focusing their efforts on “people who are or should be Democrats—the emphasis on the should be.”

The biggest challenge for Wellstone lies in reaching the state's growing, shifting mass of independent voters. Although Minnesota is often identified as liberal, reflecting the politics of native sons Hubert Humphrey and Walter Mondale, Blodgett argues that it is more accurately defined as populist. In the past decade, Minnesota voters have elected not only liberal senators Wellstone and Mark Dayton, but also right-winger Rod Grams and Reform Party maverick Jesse Ventura (who beat Coleman and Humphrey's son, Skip, to become governor in 1998).

Wellstone appeals to voters who like someone fighting for the little guy, but he is also vulnerable to the state's willingness to turn out incumbents—especially since he irritated some by running for a third time after promising, following his first victory, that he would serve only two terms. Wellstone simply says that with the Senate narrowly in Democratic control and the Republicans controlling the House and presidency, he feels it's important for him to stay and fight. But he has belatedly learned the old lesson of “never say ‘never.’”

During his first two terms, Wellstone has tried to play by different rules, staking out one of the most consistently progressive records in the Senate. The make-up of the chamber has forced Wellstone to spend more of his time fighting Republican proposals and even the conservative drift of his own party—like his vote against President Clinton's welfare reform—than promoting the big issues that inspire him, such as single-payer national health insurance.

Yet Wellstone has learned how to get things done on a smaller scale, even working with Republicans, such as New Mexico's Pete Domenici and Ohio's Mike DeWine, to make insurance companies give parity to mental health care and improve retraining programs for displaced workers. He also has taken lonely stands for principle, such as when he was one of only two senators to write a letter supporting former SEC chief Arthur Levitt's position that accounting firms, like Arthur Andersen, should not provide consulting services to accounting clients. At the time, about 75 senators—Democrats as well as Republicans—wrote letters opposing such restrictions. Then came the Enron scandal.

But Wellstone also has been attacked from the left for his support of military action after September 11, his sympathies for Israel, and his vote for the Defense of Marriage Act (which Wellstone admits is “the vote I most question” from 12 years in the Senate). As a result, the Minnesota Green Party nominated American Indian activist Ed McGaa to run against Wellstone. Although he plans to fight for Green voters—who gave 5 percent of the state's presidential votes to Ralph Nader in 2000—McGaa's bid may do less damage to Wellstone than to the nascent party, making the Greens appear deliberately marginal and destructive of viable left politics.

Wellstone is respectful of the fractious movements that supply many of the troops for his grassroots politicking, but he is frustrated with the way many progressives evaluate political strategy. "I always remember that [historian] Barrington Moore talked about the historically viable options," he says. "Don't do some analysis that says welfare mothers in the '60s should have made a coalition with the building trades. Well, they would have liked to, but the building trades weren't interested. You judge people by what are historically viable options. I'm very proud of what I've done in the Senate."

At the same time, he says that progressives need to better understand and tolerate differences among themselves. "It always makes me angry when people assume—and it happens on the left—that if someone takes a different position, it's only because he doesn't have courage, not because he doesn't have a different position."

In a close race, a couple thousand votes could be very important. But Dan McGrath, executive director of Progressive Minnesota, expects Wellstone to lose few votes to the Greens. "There's not a greater leader for progressive issues than him," he says. "I think a lot of Greens will be pulled that way."

A far bigger wild card could be Jesse Ventura's Independence Party. Ventura will not run for re-election this year, but former conservative Democratic Rep. Tim Penny will run for governor, giving a potential boost to the party and its neophyte Senate candidate, a banker named Jim Moore, who will probably draw more votes from Coleman than Wellstone. "The Independence vote might be gravy for Wellstone," McGrath says. "They might be conservative or independent-minded folks, as well as some civil libertarians, who might otherwise go with Republicans for economic reasons. That's a liability for Norm."

Wellstone will paint Coleman, once a popular mayor associated with the revival of downtown St. Paul, as a hardcore conservative who won't take stands. Coleman used to be a Democrat, and his party-switching may hurt his credibility with some voters, especially since he delivered a rousing nomination speech six years ago on behalf of Wellstone. "We're running against a guy who doesn't believe in anything or sides with the White House," Blodgett says. "He's a moving target on the issues. He tries to hide his position on some issues. ... It's our job to expose him as the kind of politician he is, the worst kind, who will say whatever people want to hear ... and do whatever it takes to advance himself."

Polls consistently have shown Wellstone with a slim lead, within the margin of error, and the percentage of voters declaring themselves undecided is relatively small for this early in the season. Wellstone appears to be way ahead with lower-income and less-educated voters, as one might expect from a progressive pushing "kitchen-table economic issues." He also leads with very young and very old voters, as well as voters aged 45 to 54. Wellstone's polling also reflects a giant gender gap—with women favoring him—so he's calling attention to Coleman's total opposition to abortion even in cases of rape and incest.

Wellstone has a strong edge over Coleman in rural and small town areas, and his support for the recent farm bill—especially the conservation measures—should help him further. But the population of "greater Minnesota" is shrinking and becoming more suburban. Wellstone thinks his emphasis on education will help with suburban voters, and he's counting on the Democratic base in the Twin Cities core. Given the trends in other centers

of well-educated, high-tech voters, Wellstone should be able to make deeper inroads than he has among better-educated suburbanites with his emphasis on environmental, education and social issues. Yet, as Wellstone argues, noting that not all suburbs are affluent, "for a lot of people who live in suburbs these issues of affordable housing and health care and childcare are as important as anywhere else."

Wellstone's long history of corporate criticism may prove politically advantageous against Coleman, whose law firm has lobbied for many big corporate interests, including Enron. The Wellstone campaign has pressured Coleman to return contributions from several tainted corporations or their top executives, including WorldCom and Global Crossing, and is making protection of Social Security a major issue since Coleman supports a form of privatization. "This race could come down to who do you trust to be a real watchdog for your pensions and retirement," says Wellstone spokesman Jim Farrell, "and if it does, we'll win."

Over the years, Wellstone has had the good political sense to mind local constituencies while fighting on the big issues. He wins kudos nationally for opposing drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, but he scores points in Minnesota by talking about polluted lakes that threaten walleye fishing and by reminding hunters that he beat back Trent Lott's efforts to shorten the Minnesota duck-hunting season. Likewise, Wellstone has won support from groups ranging from veterans to medical device manufacturers, a prominent Minnesota industry, for his efforts on their behalf. "What Wellstone has got to do is tell concretely what he's done for people and what he will do in the future," argues Carleton College political science professor Steven Schier. "The more he can stay on that and the evidentiary record, the better it will be."

Indeed, after the campaign ran a positive television ad about his accomplishments for just one week in June, Wellstone's approval ratings rose sharply. But attacks on Wellstone could turn rough and nasty. Already a statewide anti-abortion group with close ties to Coleman has been conducting a telephone campaign to lists of church members, attacking Wellstone as an "extreme" pro-abortion senator who has blocked all Bush judicial appointments (although Wellstone publicly supported a Bush appointee from Minnesota).

With a broad base of small contributors and strong support from labor, Wellstone thought he would be able to adequately counter Coleman on television. But anti-Wellstone, "independent" campaigns, like the harsh radio spots attacking Wellstone for "taxing the dead" because of his opposition to repealing the estate tax, could help tip the balance the other way.

Ultimately, national politics may define the race: Come November, will Minnesotans want a senator who solidly backs the president, playing up national security issues, or one who is fighting for a much different agenda? Wellstone is betting that tax cuts for the rich and privatization of Social Security won't win majority support in the state. In the end, however, he thinks that "character and trust," a preference for a candidate who is clear on where he stands, will tip the race in his favor.

That and the work of hundreds of grassroots volunteers. "There are not that many elections with the effort we have on field operations," he told the students in Minneapolis. "We've always lived by organizing." ■



# Doing the Reich Thing

The former labor secretary  
makes a bid for the  
Massachusetts governor's mansion

By Frederick Clarkson

Since his late entry to the Massachusetts governor's race in January, Robert Reich has confounded skeptics and mobilized a network of volunteer activists that draws comparisons to Robert Kennedy's 1968 presidential campaign. Win or lose, he hopes his effort will jumpstart a revival of the progressive wing of the Democratic Party.

Although Reich has never run for elected office before, he has considerable name recognition as labor secretary in the first Clinton administration, a prolific author and frequent television commentator. Still, he stunned the experts by flooding the party caucuses and electing hundreds of delegates to the state democratic convention. (Full disclosure: I was one of them). Reich is running neck-and-neck with State Treasurer Shannon O'Brien for the lead in the polls for the September 17 Democratic primary.

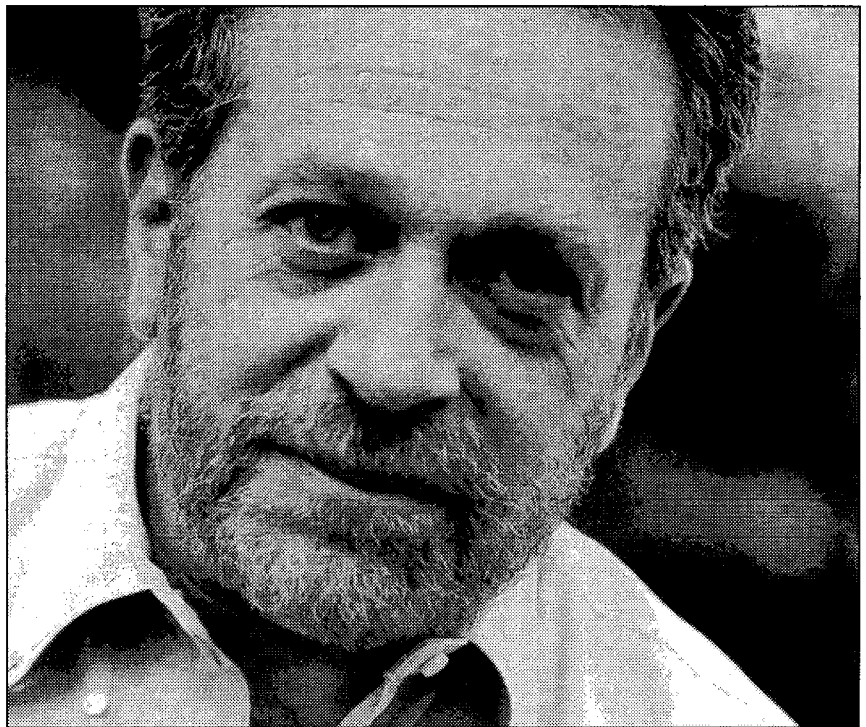
Reich is connecting with audiences by presenting himself as a battle-hardened public servant and unabashedly declaring progressive positions on issues from health care to public education to gay marriage. He is now barnstorming the state with a caravan of supporters called the "Reich Reform Express." He speaks openly of "social justice," tough enforcement of environmental laws, and addressing the "inordinate power" of corporations in the political process. Reich, who stands less than 5 feet tall, steps up to the microphone on a small platform and jokes, "As a candidate, I stand on my platform."

He faces three formidable rivals in the primary: O'Brien, state Senate President Tom Birmingham and former state Sen. Warren Tolman. The winner will face Republican Mitt Romney, best known for his stint as head honcho of the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics. The Green Party is also fielding a gubernatorial candidate for the first time, physician Jill Stein.

In *These Times* sat down with Reich just before the state Democratic convention to talk about his campaign and his critics.

**You have been a sharp critic of corporate power and its influence in society and government. How do you see that playing out in the campaign?**

The public is sick and tired of corporations that are self-serving, executives who are making fortunes and, at the same



time, laying off their workers and overriding the democratic—"small d"—will of the public. I plan to reduce influence-peddling and the kind of back-scratching that has characterized the place for so long. ... I think the public will get behind that kind of an agenda. I don't think that's a hard sell at all.

**How will you respond to the inevitable charge from the business community that "Reich is just another anti-business liberal. He will cost us jobs and raise taxes"?**

Quite the contrary. Good businesses are very supportive of efforts that rein in big and irresponsible businesses. It's the good businesses that suffer, as much as anyone, because they can't compete when big or politically well-connected businesses horn in on their markets and get special favors from the legislature. No, I'm not anti-business at all. I'm anti- the kind of business that uses its power to corrupt the democratic process.

**Progressives are feeling kind of homeless in Massachusetts. In the last presidential election, Ralph Nader got about 7 percent—one of**

his highest totals in the country. But of the more than 4 million registered voters in Massachusetts, only about 4,000 are members of the Green Party. Almost half of the registered voters are independents, and less than a third declare themselves as Democrats. What do you think is going on?

I think a lot of people are trying to figure out whether it is worth trying to get back involved with the Democratic Party—or whether the Democratic Party is basically dead, and they have to look elsewhere. I am of the view that it is still possible to revitalize the progressive wing of the Democratic Party. And that is what, in my own modest way, I'm trying to do here in Massachusetts. Now, I don't know that I will be successful. I hope so. The polls are very encouraging. The momentum is there. But my long-term hope is that we can revive a Democratic Party in which progressives feel welcome.

**Why do you think that progressive ideas can power your candidacy, when the conventional wisdom says they can't?**

Well, the conventional wisdom is absolutely wrong.

**How do you see yourself as a progressive?**

Labels mean far less than someone's record and what they actually stand for. My record is very clear. As secretary of labor, I fought very hard to raise the minimum wage over the opposition of the Republican leadership in both houses of Congress; to fight sweatshops at home and abroad; to give people better pension protection and more opportunities for lifelong learning. I have been a strong advocate for affordable health care, affordable housing and early childhood education. I am very committed to getting money out of politics and ending all forms of discrimination regarding sexual orientation, gender, race, ethnicity and religion. Now if any of this is thought to make me a progressive or a liberal, then I accept the label.

These principles are not marginal. Most Americans believe in them. They want better schools. They want more affordable health care. They don't want to be in a society that discriminates. And they certainly don't want to be in a society in which the rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer, and the middle class is barely holding on. That's not the kind of place we want our children to grow up in. There are many people who describe themselves as conservatives, or even Republicans, who buy into these ideals.

**Some of your critics say, "Bob Reich is a visionary; he doesn't know Beacon Hill." How do you take your outsider status to push an agenda through the legislature?**

Exactly the way I did it when I began at the Labor Department. I was not a Washington insider. I was not an insider to the labor movement. But I hired talented people. I worked very, very hard. I made the kind of deals that had to be made without compromising my principles. ... What you need is tenacity, a certain degree of cunning, a thick hide, a willingness

to fight and take a stand, and to go and really communicate well with the public about why you are doing it and what you want to accomplish. ... These are precisely the same qualities I will bring to Beacon Hill. I don't owe anybody anything. I can start fresh. I can make some fundamental changes that may be far more difficult for people to make if they are part of that entrenched, insider culture.

**Other critics say Bob Reich is too intellectual, too liberal, too left. They wonder if he can connect with regular people. I saw in the Boston Globe that Mitt Romney's spokesman nicknamed your new book, "Das Kapital." This could be a tough race for a progressive.**

This race is going to be fought on the basis of who is going to make the best governor. People know what I did as secretary of labor. They know I worked hard for working people. Truck drivers, bus drivers and taxi drivers pass me on the street and give me a thumbs-up. Obviously conservative Republicans will call me names. Big deal. You know, I used to say when I was secretary of labor that if the *Wall Street Journal's* editorial page didn't excoriate me every two or three weeks, I started to worry that I wasn't doing my job. ...

I have spent half of my life in academia and spent the other half of my life in public service. I have fought some very tough fights and won most of them. Anybody who accuses me of being an ivory tower intellectual is not paying attention to the half of my life when I was in the trenches. Public management is not easy. I have run a department of the federal government whose annual budget is larger than the state of Massachusetts'. We had to downsize. We had to do more with less, and we had to face a very hostile Congress. Those were difficult times.

**How does that translate into talking to ordinary people—the cab drivers and bus drivers?**

My cabinet colleagues went to the great capitals of the world for international conferences.

But as labor secretary, I went to industrial cities like Buffalo and Cleveland. My job was to represent blue-collar workers and the working families, and I spent huge amounts of time doing just that.

I did not have the advantage of growing up in a rich household. I never got an inheritance. I had to work my way to where I am. I relied on education—went to a wonderful public school—and that's why I'm so committed to education as an avenue of upward mobility. ...

It is very important to think big and give people a sense of hope. ... So it's important to operate on two levels. Talking to real people about very particular issues they have, but also to set a large-scale agenda—that's the essence of leadership. ■

**Frederick Clarkson writes about politics and religion. He is the author of *Eternal Hostility: The Struggle Between Theocracy and Democracy* (Common Courage Press).**

I am of the view that it is still possible to revitalize the progressive wing of the Democratic Party. And that is what, in my own modest way, I am trying to do here in Massachusetts.



# Hell No, They Won't Go

Hundreds of Israeli soldiers refuse to serve in the Occupied Territories

By Mary Abow

In December 2000, 23-year-old Israeli army Lt. Ishai Sagi was called up for emergency duty in the West Bank. With the second *intifada* in its third month, Sagi's mission was to protect a road that led to a Jewish settlement. "I was ordered to make sure that every Palestinian who raised a stone was shot," he says.

High cliffs rose up on either side of the road. Palestinian children sometimes dropped stones off the edge, endangering settlers who sped past in cars below. Sagi found himself confronted with a terrible choice: "I could either shoot and kill a Palestinian boy who picks up a stone, or let that stone fall and kill a car of Israeli settlers."

The picture was complicated further when the settlers themselves gathered every other Friday to throw stones at Palestinian cars. "My soldiers began asking me, 'Ishai, are you telling us we have to protect Israeli settlers who throw stones at Palestinians, but shoot Palestinians who throw stones at settlers?'" he recalls. "I had trouble answering them."

By August 2001, Sagi had notified his commanders that he would no longer serve in the Occupied Territories and was doing time in a military prison. When he was released, he joined Courage to Refuse, a movement of Israeli conscripts, soldiers and reservists who refuse to fight beyond Israel's 1967 borders. (The campaign has recently changed its name to the Refuser Solidarity Network.) Sagi became the 31st soldier to sign the campaign's "Combatant Letter," a petition stating that the undersigned would no longer, "rule, expel, destroy, blockade, assassinate, starve, and humiliate an entire people." The letter—with 468 signatures at last count—calls the army's operations in the Occupied Territories a "War of the Settlements" to maintain control over some 200 fortified Jewish colonies, while leaving the borders of Israel exposed.

The campaign's Web site has become a forum for soldiers to explain their decision and unburden themselves. Assaf Oron, a onetime sergeant major and the eighth soldier to sign the Combatant Letter, describes how his army service turned him into "the perfect occupation enforcer." He writes: "Where else can you go out on patrol ... walk the streets like a king, harass and humiliate pedestrians to your heart's content ... and at the same time feel like a big hero defending your country?" But when Oron's comrades began trying to outdo each other with

stories of murderous beatings—who had beaten more Palestinians to death, and whose tales were bloodier—he knew he too had to get out.

In general, all Jewish Israeli men and women are conscripted into the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) at age 18. Men serve three years and are then required to perform annual reserve duty until they reach age 45. Women serve for about two years and mostly are exempted from the reserves. Currently, more than 1,000 soldiers, conscripts and reservists have publicly refused to serve in the Occupied Territories.

Conscientious objectors are not new in Israel, but what makes this movement different is that many of the resisters are high-ranking officers, majors and captains who have seen years of active combat. The "refuseniks," as they're called, represent an array of political opinions. Few would call themselves pacifists. Many, like Sagi, are "selective refusers" who refuse to participate in the occupation but are willing to serve within Israel. After 26 days in a military jail, Sagi was reassigned to such a post. But he says that in recent months, as the number of refusers has mounted, the army is sending them straight to prison. At present, 50 conscientious objectors are incarcerated—more than at any other time in Israeli history.

The concept of selective refusal took root in the wake of Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, an incursion that dislodged the PLO from its Beirut headquarters. Growing numbers of soldiers saw the invasion, which claimed the lives of nearly 18,000 people, mostly civilians, as an act of blatant aggression and refused to participate.

Ram Rahat was part of that early movement. A doctor who had moved to Israel from Canada in 1980, Rahat was drafted into a medical unit that would be sent into Lebanon. "I knew from the start that this was something I couldn't be a part of," he recalls. "Israel invaded Lebanon despite the fact that for an entire year before the invasion, there had been a cease fire between the PLO and Israel that had been meticulously observed by the PLO."

Rahat explained his concerns to his commanding officer, whom he describes as "a sympathetic man," and was transferred to a medical supply base outside Tel Aviv. By 1985, more than



Ishai Sagi

STEVEN FEUERSTEIN



Ram Rahat

STEVEN FEUERSTEIN

3,500 reservists had signed a petition saying they weren't going to Lebanon. "That may not mean like a lot, but it's the equivalent of 150,000 American troops refusing to go to the Gulf War," Rahat says. And not all of them were met with such sympathy; 168 servicemen were jailed, some repeatedly, for their refusal.

With that petition, the movement to support selective refusal, known as Yesh Gvul ("There is a Limit"), was born. Despite intense surveillance by the police and security services, Yesh Gvul continues to counsel soldiers, providing moral and material support to refusers and their families. Rahat says the movement in the '80s helped end the invasion of Lebanon, and he believes a similar movement today can end the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. He says, "We did it before," he says. "We can do it again."

While Yesh Gvul helps those who are "selective resisters," others refuse to serve in the IDF entirely. Months before the Combatant Letter went public, a group of 62 high school seniors, some of them anticipating their 18th birthdays, drafted their own petition. The so-called Senior's Letter, now with 170 signatures, was faxed to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in September, informing him that they would not be taking part in the occupation and declaring that "land expropriation, arrests, executions without a trial, house demolition, closure, torture and the prevention of health care are only some of the crimes the state of Israel carries out, in blunt violation of international conventions it has ratified."

The first to sign the petition was Haggai Matar, an 18-year-old from a town near Tel Aviv. During a spring speaking tour in Chicago, sponsored by the Jewish group Not In My Name, Matar called for an end to U.S. economic and military aid to Israel. He has visited the West Bank several times—not as a machine-gun toting soldier, but as a humanitarian worker. On those trips bringing food and medicine to besieged Palestinian villages, he witnessed the mistreatment of Palestinians by Israeli troops. "There is no way I can take part in anything that has to do with this government, this army, this occupation," he says.

Matar cites a 1958 Israeli Supreme Court ruling on the infamous Kafr Qassim massacre, when Israeli border police gunned down 50 Palestinian villagers who defied an army curfew. At trial, it came out that the villagers were never told about the curfew. When the police argued they were "just following orders," the judge convicted them with the following words: "On certain orders, the black flag of manifest illegality flies. ... A soldier has not only the right, but also the duty to disobey such orders."

"The entire occupation has a black flag flying above it," Matar says. But because Israeli law does not allow men to refuse on the basis of conscience, Matar expects to go to jail in October. Typically, sentences are for 28 days in military prisons. But new conscripts who refuse to serve usually receive two or three consecutive terms, and Matar expects to remain in jail for three to four months before being discharged.

Yet despite the threat of jail, Matar says, the movement to refuse has been growing. "More and more people are starting to say, 'Hey, why should I waste three years of my life trying to get myself killed?'" Many young people try to get out of serving by playing crazy. "They say, 'My parents are divorced and I can't

deal with it. I have nightmares. I sweat. I take drugs. I'm gonna kill myself.'" Others try to make the case that they have migraines or back problems for which they can be released or given a lower-profile assignment. "The army actually prefers that," he continues, "they would rather declare someone insane than admit that there are objectors."

The petitions from conscripts and reservists have reinvigorated the Israeli peace movement and inspired other sectors of society. An "Open Letter from Faculty Members," signed by 317 professors from different Israeli universities, has pledged to support students who "encounter academic, administrative or economic difficulties as a result of their refusal to serve in the territories." And something of a consensus has begun to form around the incendiary issue of terrorism. Yes, the suicide bombers are coming into Israeli cities and killing civilians, but what drives them? "By being in the Occupied Territories, we are creating a base of terrorism," Rahat says. "Every time we go in with another operation, we're creating more and more hate."

Perhaps no one can put the refusal movement in perspective better than 78-year-old peace activist and former Knesset member Uri Avnery, who calls himself a "reformed terrorist," in reference to his long ago involvement with the Irgun, an armed Zionist group. "This is the beginning of a process," he wrote recently. "Nobody can know yet how powerful it will become and how far it will go. But one thing is certain: Something is happening." ■



Uri Avnery



Haggai Matar

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# Building Bantustans in the West Bank

By Charmaine Seitz

**RAMALLAH, THE WEST BANK**—Ramallah is eerily quiet. In the mornings, Palestinians wake and listen for traffic, a sign that the Israeli military has lifted its injunction against going outside. Sometimes, the traffic is wrong and gunshots ring out. Then: silence once more.

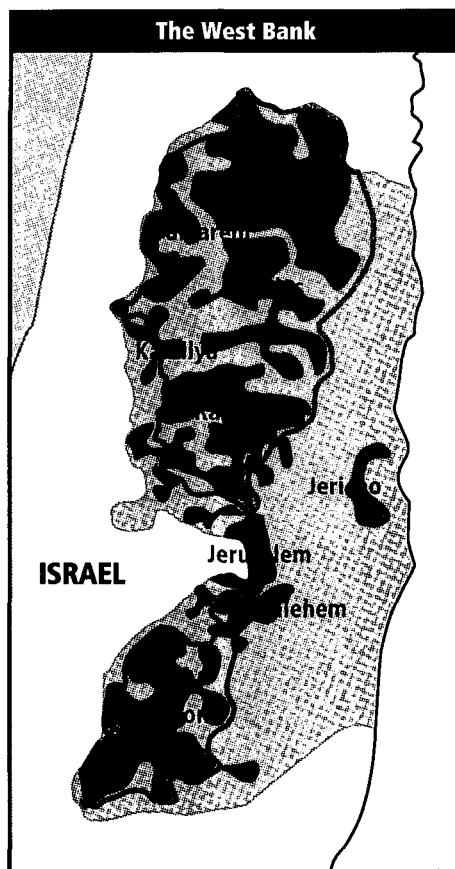
The despair is palpable. "It is very bad," says Rima Tarazi of the General Union of Palestinian Women. "If you are going to ask me now what I see for the next year, I don't know. I can't tell you anything."

But what Palestinians express as hopelessness, the Israeli government sees as a big victory. Armed Palestinian attacks have slowed—but not ceased—as the Israeli army is once again patrolling Palestinian towns. What is rarely talked about is the accompanying loss: prospects for viable Palestinian statehood.

"I think Israel believes that it has defeated the Palestinians," says Jeff Halper of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions. "It is finished. The war is over. What that means then is that Israel doesn't have to negotiate anymore with the Palestinians. Israel is now free to pretty much impose whatever it wants."

In recent weeks, walls have been built, plans approved and settlements institutionalized that literally reshape the West Bank. In the northern half of the West Bank, construction is well underway on a fence dividing Israel proper from the areas it occupied in 1967. Or almost. Palestinians say that the 110-kilometer fence, first approved in 2001, actually dips beyond the 1967 borders, completing the de facto annexation of 69 square kilometers of the West Bank, including 11 villages of some 40,000 Palestinians. Another 2,500 acres of West Bank land has been confiscated from Palestinian landowners for the building of a second wall stretching north from southern Tulkarem.

Amid the recent violence, the Israeli government has approved settlement plans previously considered too controversial. The final door has nearly closed on Palestinian access to East Jerusalem, annexed by Israel in 1980. In June, Israel's zoning commission approved the Eastern Gate plan, a settlement complex that cartographer Jan de Jong predicted in 1998 would "determine the chances of

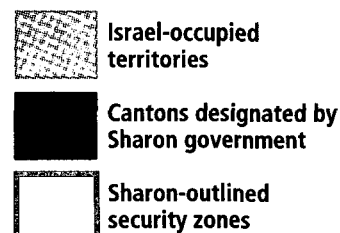


GRAPHIC: NATHAN STRAIT; DATA: FMFP

East Jerusalem forever." The new scheme and accompanying roads would make it possible for Israel to add 800,000 Israeli settlers to the area, while preventing Palestinian growth in the city. Currently, there are some 200,000 Israelis in East Jerusalem settlements, competing with 200,000 Palestinians.

While Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer made world headlines last month for dismantling several outposts put up by Israeli settlers in the West Bank without government approval, settlement watchdog groups say the move was just a smokescreen. The 90 outposts were reduced by 11, but the rest gained de facto government support. It is no accident that these sparsely manned outposts lay just on the seams of Palestinian populated areas. "What is actually happening is a slow process of legitimizing these settlements," says Dror Etkes of Peace Now.

The northern West Bank will be split from the Ramallah area by an extensive bloc of settlements connected to Israel. The Ramallah area will then be cut off



from the southern West Bank by an enlarged Jerusalem controlled by Israel. Another small canton will be made up of Palestinian communities in East Jerusalem, while walled Gaza remains largely intact. "That will be the independent state," Halper predicts of Gaza. "And then the Palestinians in the other four cantons will either get autonomy, or—if there is a lot of pressure—Israel will give them Palestinian citizenship. It doesn't really matter because Israel has encircled them and still has control."

The new map looks uncannily like a 1997 "peace plan" fronted by Sharon as a cabinet minister. At the time, the idea of annexing 65 percent of the West Bank and 30 percent of the Palestinians living there was laughed at. But Israelis today are convinced that by turning down the proposals offered at Camp David before the current hostilities, Palestinians rejected peace. "There is an agreement [in this Israeli government] that there should be a Bantustan," Halper says. "The Israelis don't use the word Bantustan, but that is what it is."

Halper is not the only one to draw comparisons with apartheid. "I've been very deeply distressed in my visit to the Holy Land," Archbishop Desmond Tutu told a Boston conference in April. "It reminded me so much of what happened to us black people in South Africa."

For their part, Palestinians view this new map with an uncharacteristic pessimism. There seems to be little that Palestinians can do to halt the process underway in the West Bank. "Maybe this is my idealism speaking," Halper persists hopefully, "but it is hard for me to believe that in the 21st century, in the light of day, with CNN and everything else, a new apartheid situation could actually emerge."

Still, even he admits that he has no idea what might stop it. ■

# Red Ink

By Matthew Price

**T**he 1961 publication of Daniel Aaron's *Writers on the Left* marked a scholarly watershed. One of the first academics to treat left-wing writing as a distinct strand of American litera-

**Exiles from a Future Time: The Forging of the Mid-Twentieth-Century Literary Left**

By Alan M. Wald

The University of North Carolina Press  
412 pages, \$19.95

ture, Aaron has said his work "helped to loosen the social and political constraints that for 20 years had inhibited the writing of a frank and objective history of ... literary communism." Much of the previous work on radical writing was hopelessly partisan; but as the torrid ideological passions of the '30s waned, it had become possible to write that "frank and objective history." A judicious scholar, Aaron was just the man for the job.

*Writers on the Left* endures as a classic, but it is a book not without flaws. For one, it largely centers on a New York boys club. The fellow-traveling novelist Josephine Herbst, who only merited a brief mention in Aaron's account, harumphed, "[Aaron's] heroes were the entrepreneurs of writing, the head boys who have been mostly responsible for the re-hashes, [who] were all stuck in the claustrophobia of New York City." (Then again, in the '30s, "New York became the most interesting part of the Soviet Union," said Lionel Abel.) Aaron paid little attention to regional figures, nor did he much consider the achievements of black artists or women.

For some years now, Alan Wald—in many ways Aaron's heir but unlike his precursor, a man of the left—has been reconsidering the tradition Aaron sketched, to think anew notions of art and Marxist belief. From his deep

immersion in the lost word of radical writers of Depression-era America comes Wald's absorbing new chronicle, *Exiles from a Future Time*, the first volume of a projected trilogy on literary radicalism.

**T**he sheer range of Wald's research is often astonishing. He opens a vista onto a motley collection of now forgotten writers, some party men and women, some not, who wrestled with the oft-conflicting impulses of artistic freedom and political commitment. Though Wald often falls prey to the cant of contemporary academia (he can be a dreadful stylist), and despite the somewhat baffling organization of the book—it is more a collection of linked essays than a narrative—the color and zip of the figures he writes about more than compensate for Wald's failings as a writer.

The chief delight of *Exiles from a Future Time* is the abundance of characters—a few of them downright wacky—who people Wald's pages. There is Guy Endore, novelist and screenwriter, a "life-long mystic sympathetic to theosophy";

and his poetic contemporary, Alfred Hayes, "the Byron of the Poolhalls" who was "addicted to pinball machines" and preferred the company of cabbies to intellectuals.

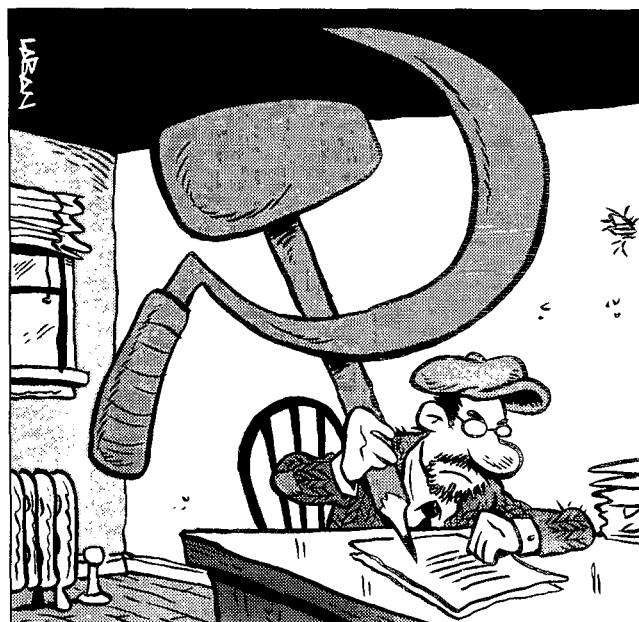
But no book on American literary radicalism would be complete without a chapter on Mike Gold, a "kind of cheeky Crazy Kat bouncing off the crania of his adversaries," as one friend described him. Gold wrote one of the most famous works of the time, *Jews without Money* (1930), a seminal "proletarian" novel, set in the slums of New York's Lower East Side, a work later championed by Alfred

**"I am that exile  
from a future time,  
from shores of freedom  
I may never know."**

Kazin and Irving Howe. Gold was a prolific contributor to the *Daily Worker* and editor of *New Masses* (which Wald writes about at length) in the late '20s, and quite a waggish poetaster: "Poetry is the cruelest bunk, / A trade union is better than all your dreams."

While Wald gives Gold due attention, he goes far beyond Aaron in scope, especially in the range of journals and magazines he covers, from *The Anvil* to *Dynamo*. Though New York looms large in the book—how could it not?—Wald is strong on regional figures, especially writers from the south. Perhaps most interesting is Donald Lee West, who in his long varied career served, among other things, as a minister and footloose labor organizer, and generally "lived a rough tumble life, sporadically fleeing from vigilantes in the middle of the night, occasionally carrying a pistol for self protection, and losing almost every job he managed to secure."

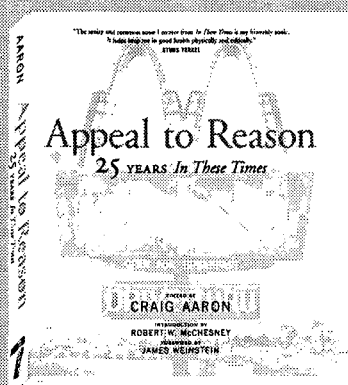
Wald devotes a section to black writers, a chapter illuminating in its exploration of the tensions between race and class ideology. Women also occupy a central place in Wald's book, particularly the writers Meridel Le Sueur, Joy Davidman and Muriel Rukeyser. Indeed, Wald is so intent on mentioning as many writers as possible, at times *Exiles*



the "Apollinaire of the proletariat," Sol Funaroff, a poet and radical who penned the lines that give the book its title ("I am that exile / from a future time, / from shores of freedom / I may never know");



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from a *Future Time* can read like an annotated phone book.

One of the pleasures of Wald's foray into the world of radical writing is the attention given to the explosion of poetry, a favored form of left writers. To his credit, he is reluctant to identify a single unifying motif; the output of radical poets was simply too various, their poetry "a melange, a bubbling cauldron, reverberating with sundry aspirations and levels of talent." Wald has an eye for the humorous bits of doggerel which featured in the anti-bourgeois harangues of the era. Take "To a Fat Bourgeois" by one Henry George Weiss, published in the *The Rebel Poet*:

O you are hog-fat and your clothing is fine.

So strike down your fodder and lap up your wine,

Let the paunch of your plenty protrude from your vest,

And the jowls of contentment fold down on your breast.

For we lean and hungry are supple and strong,

With thin lips that murmur, Not Long Now, Not Long.

Amusing stuff, but Wald doesn't shy away from acknowledging that much working-class literature "embodied a temptation to indulge in anti-intellectual, subjective and partisan simplicities." The best work from the '30s was poignant and vivid, "political" without being overbearing. Consider the austere imagism of "Picket Lines on a Coal Mine" by W.S. Stacy:

Gaunt faces and tense bodies  
knit by hunger's bond  
into a solid chain  
indissolvable—

Wald's explication of the poems is insightful. He remarks keenly on the fraught relation between modernist aesthetics, whose two exponents, T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, were men of the right, but whose verse exerted a profound influence on the left. Still, he has a maddening tendency to state the plainly obvious: "Poetic symbols and allusions are difficult to translate into precise political strategies." You don't say?

But in Wald's perceptive studies of the tensions between the Communist Party and left-leaning writers, he largely

excels. There is a stereotype of the radical writer as just a party hack on orders from Moscow, but Wald convincingly insists that we hesitate before we dismiss left writers of the '30s as mere megaphones of apparatchiks. To be sure, more than a few were more concerned with cheap propaganda than art, but Wald's examples largely refute this. Mike Gold, for example, was nobody's man, though he has been caricatured as a cultural bureaucrat.

This is not to say the party did not have power over left writers. But it is a matter of degree: "The impact of the Soviet Union on cultural work, although vivid and multifarious, was far from all-encompassing." Of the maligned culture commissars, men like Alexander Trachtenberg and V.J. Jerome, Wald writes, "such men had power ... only in certain contexts or at particular moments; they were merely elements, albeit influential ones, of a vital and fractious cultural movement. Their authority was due primarily to their connections with the Party apparatus, but they were never the movers and shakers of practical literary activity at the movement's base."

Still, Wald doesn't much consider the impact of the Moscow show trials, or the seismic shifts on the left in the wake of the Nazi-Soviet pact of the late '30s. Nor does he have much to say on the diktats of socialist realism, afflatus for so many unfortunate products. Wald's main concern is to plumb the wellsprings of an indigenous, home-grown, American literary radicalism, influenced as much by Jack London and Upton Sinclair as Maxim Gorky.

But no matter how independent it may have been (and there are some who argue stridently it wasn't at all), there is much truth in a comment once made by bohemian radical Floyd Dell: "What happened to American literature was the Russian Revolution." Indeed, the Russian Revolution provided direction, a highly idealized goal for radical writers. Still, one wonders if they might have arrived at their conclusions all by themselves. After all, as Daniel Aaron reminds us, "American literature, for all its affirmative spirit, is the most searching and unabashed criticism of our national limitations that exists." ■

Matthew Price often writes on intellectual history for *In These Times*.

# All the Rage

By James North

In much of *What Went Wrong?* Bernard Lewis maintains his usual persona: the elderly but vigorous scholar who has spent a lifetime mastering the Middle East's languages and studying its texts, crit-

## **What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response**

By Bernard Lewis

Oxford University Press

180 pages, \$23

## **The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads and Modernity**

By Tariq Ali

Verso

342 pages, \$22

icizing its peoples with seeming reluctance and sorrowful detachment. After September 11, he was much in demand in the mainstream media, and this short book spent several months on the *New York Times* bestseller list.

But one chapter in *What Went Wrong?* perfectly reveals why Lewis is such a misleading and dangerous thinker. In "Time, Space and Modernity," he claims that in the Middle East there has been a "selective rejection of Western music." Lewis writes that "a distinguishing characteristic of Western music is polyphony, by harmony or counterpoint... Different performers play together, from different scores, producing a result that is greater than the sum of its parts."

Lewis continues: "With a little imagination one may discern the same feature in other aspects of Western culture—in democratic politics and in team games, both of which require the cooperation, in harmony if not in unison, of different performers playing different parts in a common purpose."

He is cunning enough to leave the conclusion largely unsaid: Arabs and Muslims, with their harsh, discordant music, are incapable of the give and take of democracy. In

fact, they should even give up hope of ever winning soccer's World Cup.

You can use this kind of thinking to prove anything. Umm Kulthum, the great Egyptian singer who brought the Arab world to a standstill with her monthly radio concerts until her death in 1975, was renowned for, among other qualities, her perfect diction and for creatively reinterpreting the same line over and over again. You could, "with a little imagination," use her popularity to prove that Arabs possess an admirable combination of precision and originality and should prosper in high-tech design and production.

Most mainstream reviewers ignored Lewis' bizarre outburst. And in fact, most of the book is not so blatant, consisting mostly of the mundane presentation of various facts scattered across centuries of

largely unchanged over the past 14 centuries. They study that world by looking for this essence, much of which may be found in central texts like the Quran and other ancient works. Once they have grasped this fundamental nature, they feel they can readily understand the Muslim world today. As the brilliant Lebanese-born professor As'ad Abu Khalil has written, "People rush to study Islam as if it offers the skeleton key to understanding the political complexities of the Middle East."

So: Why are Egyptian college graduates angry at their own government and at the West? Don't try to explain their attitudes by looking at tremendous unemployment levels they suffer, the unelected military dictatorship they live under—one supported by America with billions of dollars of aid—or at the ongoing killing of Palestinian civilians and children right next door. Instead, point to what Lewis called, in an influential 1990 essay, vague, timeless "Muslim rage."

You have to pause for a moment to see just how inhuman the Orientalist view is.

You don't have to be an Orientalist to recognize differences between cultures, nor to criticize features of other cultures, such as the inferior status of women in much of the Middle East and South Asia. (Although you should also be prepared to acknowledge strengths: Cairo has one of the lowest crime rates of any big city in the world, not due to repression, but because of a dense network of mutually supportive family, community and workplace ties.) But once you presume a vast chasm between you and the Others, a fundamental difference embedded in your very natures, you are straying into some very ugly intellectual territory.



history. Yet Lewis' excursion into musical theory was not an unfortunate lapse, but central to his way of thinking.

Lewis is an "Orientalist," a term that may be growing unclear as it has become more widespread. Orientalist is by no means the same as "racist"; Lewis could comfortably pass a lie detector test that probed for overt prejudice. But his approach is nonetheless pernicious. Orientalists believe that the Muslim world is a unity, with an essential nature that is

Tariq Ali is a vital corrective to the simplicities of Orientalism. His book's title, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms*, and its cover (a composite photograph combining portraits of Osama bin Laden and George W. Bush) are misleading, giving the impression he deals equally with Islam and the West. In fact, Ali's sections about American imperialism are partly true, but too one-dimensional and therefore mercifully short.

Most of the book is a learned, thorough, engagingly written, at times appropriately



first-person survey of Muslim history and society, which reveals far more complexity and dissidence than the monolithic Orientalist view. Ali himself is from an elite Pakistani family, but his parents were both Communists and he, despite amusing encounters in his youth with Quran teachers, is a lifelong atheist. He reminds us that the Muslim world has never been a unity. Over the centuries, there have been heretics and rebels, along with a long tradition of passive, gentle Sufi mysticism. More recently, the Middle East and South Asia have had influential and secular nationalist movements and significant Communist parties.

He sets the record straight throughout this long but unfailingly interesting book, particularly in the sections on Pakistan, a misunderstood nation of almost 140 million. He gives a lively account of Islamic fundamentalism there, but then reminds us that the Islamists have never won much popular support—10 percent, at most. He points out, with a sly smile, that “The Pakistani electorate ... casts proportionately fewer votes for religious fundamentalists than voters in Israel.”

Lewis' work may have directly inspired Samuel P. Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations*, the 1996 effort to revive the Cold War in a new guise, but Ali reminds us that during World War I, Muslim Arabs allied with the “infidel” British to win independence from Muslim Turks. Saudi Arabia remains a staunch Western ally to this day. Iran and Iraq, both Muslim, fought a terrible war in the '80s that killed more than a million people. In Ali's own homeland, another 5,000 people have died in recent years in sectarian conflicts among Muslims.

Ali does overstate what he calls “the desperation and hatred that surfaces in large parts of the world against the United States and its allies.” He mentions a few anecdotes about people in various parts of the Third World (not just the Muslim world) celebrating after the September 11 attacks, but he extrapolates too much from them.

In fact, violent Islam has been on the decline across the Muslim world. Attacks on Western tourists in Egypt in the '90s prompted such overwhelming revulsion among the Egyptian people that the largest violent Islamic group had to declare a cease-fire, and the country is safe for visitors once again. With the exception of Iran in 1979, and Algeria in 1990-91, militant Islamists have never won overwhelming

popular support anywhere. People in the Muslim world do have understandable political grievances with the United States, but you are not going to find blind, widespread, violent hatred there.

**Y**et a minority of fanatics can still cause terrible havoc. Ali does not disregard dangerous social and political instability in the Middle East and South Asia. Specifically, he uses his detailed understanding of Pakistan to warn that fundamentalist Islam, although a minority view, has infiltrated the national army to a dangerous extent. He has an excellent chapter on the conflict between Pakistan and India over Kashmir, and he genuinely worries that it could provoke a regional nuclear war.

Rather than rely on some vague notion of Muslim rage, Ali investigates by looking at history (not just 12th-century history), class formations, political competition and so on. His work shows why Orientalism not only demeans other human beings, but is also useless as analysis. Until only 10 or 15 years ago, you could read Orientalist-type views about Latin Americans and their supposedly innate incapacity for political democracy. Some so-called experts said the long history of military coups there was the

inevitable legacy of the Spanish conquest, of a Catholic culture of authoritarianism and indolence. Now that Latin Americans have largely maintained democracy under economic conditions at least as trying as Europe in the 1930s, you don't hear such twaddle anymore.

Orientalism is also worthless as a program of action. Ali's analysis implies, for instance, that economic change in the Middle East and South Asia that eased unemployment would reduce political violence, both within the region and elsewhere. This may be a tough goal, but it is at least conceivable. By contrast, Lewis is pessimistic. “If the peoples of the Middle East continue on their present path,” he hysterically warns, “the suicide bomber may become a metaphor for the whole region, and there will be no escape from a downward spiral of hate and spite, rage and self-pity, poverty and oppression.”

It is sad that a lifetime of scholarship produced a conclusion that is so simple-minded, and so wrong. ■

*James North has reported for In These Times since 1977 from Europe, Africa, Latin America and Asia. He was recently in Egypt. His e-mail address is jamesnorth@mail.com.*

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# Living the Highlife

By G. Pascal Zachary

To watch U2 singer Bono traveling around Africa, relentlessly advocating for debt relief alongside the secretary of the U.S. Treasury, is to be reminded of the old connection between rock stars and African humanitarian causes. Bono may be imbued with an Irish compassion, but he is only the latest

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rockers to trumpet the cause of the African poor and afflicted. I was a grade-school boy when the Beatles took America by storm in the '60s, and I will never forget my first images of Africa, which I associated with one Beatle in particular.

The pictures showed gaunt, starving babies from a place called Biafra, which George Harrison had taken a liking to. Biafra was created when a tribe called the Ibo, prominent around the Niger River Delta, seceded in 1967 from the West African nation of Nigeria. The Nigerian army, after initial setbacks, laid siege to the Ibo who, in their desperation, appealed to the rest of the world for help. (This had the perverse effect of prolonging the war—it lasted more than two years—and adding immensely to the casualties.) The plight of Biafrans captured Harrison's conscience and gave birth to a new pattern in pop culture: the singer who cared about the Fate of the Earth and then held a benefit concert to prove it.

Harrison's concert brought great attention to the cause of the Ibo, giving birth to another iron law of pop culture: The defining images of the South, or of Africa at least, are often constructed by the singers and poets of the North ... and then fed back to the South. The frantic race by rockers to find their own causes

among the wretched of the earth almost obscures the fact that the poor of the developing world have their own singers and songs.

The Ibo, for instance, are famously cultivated. Their members include Chinua Achebe, author of Africa's most literary novel in English, *Things Fall Apart*, a haunting depiction of the collision between Ibo traditions and European imperialism. Notable for lacking a monarchy, the Ibo instead invested ultimate power in the political structures within each village, giving rise to a form of politics that anticipated the "town hall" democracy of New England. Participation extended to Ibo women, who became a formidable force in public life.

The British, used to getting their way with colonial Africans, were repeatedly

the women." In recent years, militant Ibo activists, in the face of growing tensions within an unmanageable Nigeria, have called for greater autonomy and even revived the secessionist dream.

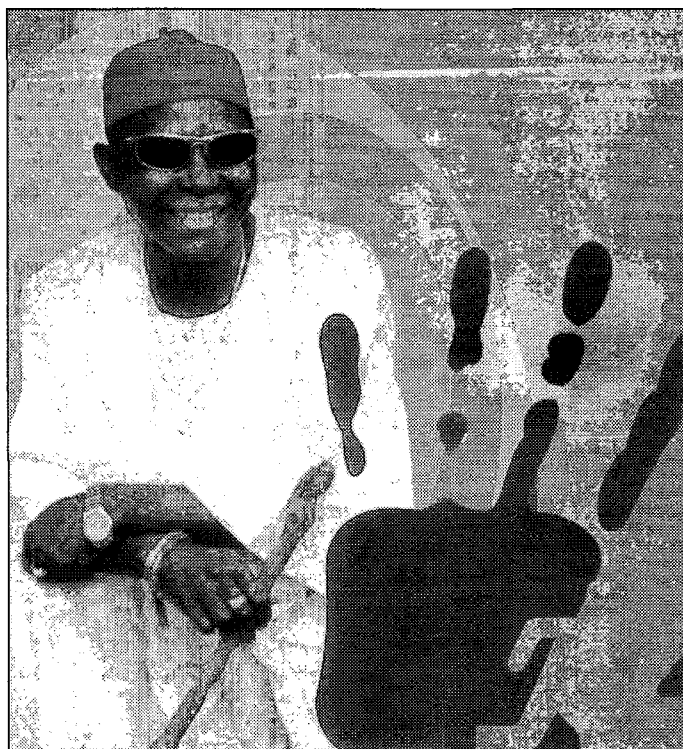
The Ibo, who number upward of 20 million today, have made their mark on music as well as literature. The Biafrans knew little of the Beatles, but they embraced a swinging bandleader named Stephen Osita Osadebe. Singing in the Ibo language, with a sprinkling of pidgin English, Osadebe began recording in 1958 and cemented his popularity by remaining in Iboland during the war. The '70s saw a transformation of Nigerian music as horn-driven dance tunes—better known as highlife—gave way to a funky sound influenced by soul singer James Brown. Fela Kuti was the embodiment of Nigerian funk.

While Fela and the "juju" musician Sunny Ade, a member of the Yoruba people, dominated the music exported from Nigeria to America, within the country Osadebe thrived. He carried on a tradition of highlife associated with the great Nigerian trumpeter Rex Lawson. Osadebe retained a strong brass element in his bands, even when acoustic sounds went out of fashion. He remains partial to trumpet solos of the same sort that Duke Ellington used to give his band a wistful color.

In 1984, as Ade and Fela were giving Nigerian music a ribald and confrontational image around the world, Osadebe retained his folksy roots, releasing his most successful album, *Osondi Owendi* ("sweetness and bitterness"). A social critic whose language is more polite than Fela's, Osadebe sings of the joys and disappointments of ordinary life, poking fun at pretension and celebrating the importance

of perseverance.

At nearly the age of 60, in 1995 Osadebe made his first tour of the United States and recorded what counts as among the finest West African albums available, *Kedu America*. Recorded in



Chief Stephen Osita Osadebe

stung by loud, angry and even violent protests against their policies by Ibo women. "When the character of the riots themselves is reviewed," one British observer wrote, "the overwhelming impression is of the vigor and solidarity of



Seattle under the supervision of Andrew Frankel and Osadebe's Nigerian-born but L.A.-based manager Nnamdi Moweta, *Kedu* contains new recordings of some of Osadebe's classic songs. The music is thrilling throughout. The session opens with the entire band engaged in raucous chatter—and then bursting into a blistering guitar line. Somebody mutters, "this is very nice music," and the guitar trades parts with stuttering drums until the horns enter. By the time Osadebe joins with his groaning, bluesy voice—reminiscent of John Lee Hooker in its gruffness—the band has turned every soulful phrase in the Ibo songbook.

**W**hile a critical triumph, *Kedu* failed to gain Osadebe anything like the stature achieved by Sunny Ade. But among Ibo living in America—there are large numbers in places like Houston, Los Angeles and Oakland—he is exalted. When he tours these cities, as he did last fall, he plays only private clubs, gatherings of Ibo faithful who come to hear a dose of their homeland. An Ibo group in Houston, say, rents a hall for him to perform in. Only

Ibo show up, because the performance goes completely unpublicized.

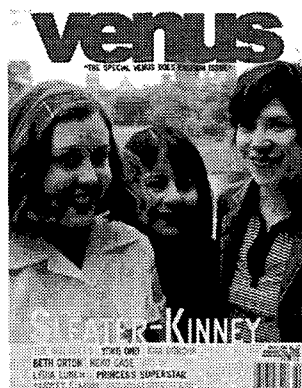
In these performances, Osadebe always sings what the Ibo call "praise songs," where he improvises lyrics about the peo-

## The connection between West African singers and their audiences has always been intimate.

ple in attendance. The connection between West African singers and their audiences has always been intimate, with the dividing line between stage and seat blurry at best. In response to the success of these invitation-only concerts in U.S. cities, Osadebe last fall released *Club America* (for which I wrote the liner notes). While recorded in a Seattle studio, the album has the feel of a night in an Ibo social club, where people who spend their days trying to fit into America unwind with their own kind.

*Club America* lacks the raw energy of *Kedu* but is more typical of the lilting, swaying dance music that Ibos, young and old, find infectious. A third album, *Sound Time*, also released last year, contains 70 minutes of songs first released by Osadebe on cassette tapes between 1970 and 1985. This music, previously only available in Nigeria, conjures up the moments of relief and even ecstasy in the post-Biafra years. The civil war had been the first indication that post-colonial civil wars would be barbaric (the debasement of the war—and all wars—was captured by Ken Saro-Wiwa in his 1985 novel *Sozaboy*). In the aftermath, a grittier yet still joyous strain of highlife emerged, with Osadebe as a leading exponent.

Osadebe's popularity is immense in Iboland: He is Frank Sinatra and Bob Dylan rolled into one. In the United States, he is lionized in Ibo social clubs, where I was fortunate enough to see him perform last October. Except for my guests and me, the crowd in Oakland's California Ballroom was all Ibo. At the age of 67, Osadebe showed no signs of tiring, even when the band kept on past 2 a.m. ■



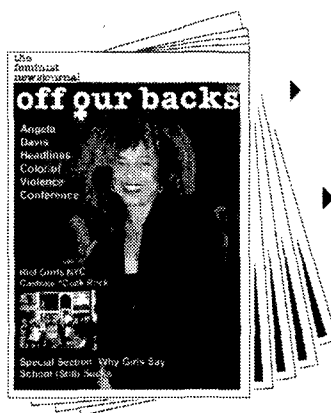
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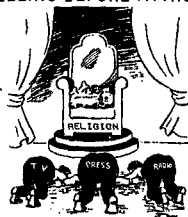
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# THE GAMES PEOPLE PLAY

BY ALEX KELLOGG

In the densely pixilated world of virtual reality, bloodletting is the *modus operandi*. The majority of games follow a simple logic: Kill or be killed. The exhilaration sought is like the medium itself, virtual and fleeting. Bursting opponents' guts wide open may be very satisfying (particularly for adolescent boys of all ages), but such games ultimately cheapen human life, however slight or temporary the diminution.

That said, the thrill of violence for its own sake is very different than violence in the name of extinction or genocide. So when Resistance Records, a distributor of racist, anti-Semitic "White Power" music, started advertising *Ethnic Cleansing* on its Web site on Martin Luther King Day, virtual reality took on a whole new dimension.

The object of the game is to kill off a race of "subhumans" comprised entirely of African-Americans and Latinos, and ultimately destroy their "masters," the Jews. Players must navigate a post-apocalyptic urban landscape that is clearly New York City, mowing down African-American adversaries to the sound of ape and monkey noises, while poncho-clad Latinos say "I'll take a siesta now" or "Aye caramba!" when they are killed.

The game has a startlingly high level of background detail, and as players advance in the game into the subway system, they find Jews who have been hiding out from the carnage going on above ground. The subway walls are dotted with National Alliance signs and posters appealing for, among other things, a global race war, while racist rock music blares in the background. National Alliance, the owner of Resistance Records, is one of the larger white-supremacist groups in the country.

The game's final battle involves a confrontation with the "end boss," who turns out to be a rocket-launcher-wielding Ariel Sharon. He hurls out insults such as "We have destroyed your culture!" and "We silenced Henry Ford!" When you have defeated him, he dies gasping, "Filthy white dog, you have destroyed thousands of years of planning."

His sort of overt hatred is, in its way, oddly amusing; the rhetoric of the National Alliance bespeaks its own isolation and marginalization. The group's white-supremacist rhetoric is a peculiar remnant of a formulation of race definitively discredited long ago. While there is nothing new about the message of the game, there is something new about its medium. Though *Ethnic Cleansing* is not the first of its kind (more rudimentary racist games such as *Aryan 3* and *Shoot the Blacks* have been in circulation for some time), it is certainly the most explicit.

The company whose software was used to make the game, Genesis 3D, disavowed *Ethnic Cleansing* after the Anti-Defamation League informed the company that its logo was displayed prominently on several National Alliance and

Resistance Records Web sites advertising the game. While Genesis 3D's disavowal was of course laudable, as long as we have a First Amendment there are no safeguards to prevent its technology from being used by other customers for similar purposes in the future.

More important than racist technological innovation, however, is the reflective moment games such as *Ethnic Cleansing* offer. Whether vicariously violent thrill-seeking is a bad thing or not remains a hotly debated topic. Still, it is not violence so much as the history of violence that defines where foolishness ends and vulgarity begins. For those of us who think violence against particular groups is something new in the video world, only a cursory glance at some of the games in stores reveals how frequently some slip under the radar of acceptability. For example, a recent online review of *Urban Chaos 4* reads: "The story is great. Most of the missions ain't time limited. That's good, because you can arrest civilians and shoot them. You can beat whores too. It's so cool."

The mental depravation these games engender is quite real, entering the living, breathing world every single day. The leisurely excesses of any culture are reflexive; violent video games lead to violent acts just as much as other forms of violence in our society lead to violent video games. Through games, we can measure the limits of our violent imaginations just as we stretch those bounds in real life. In either world, the violence never stops. ■

